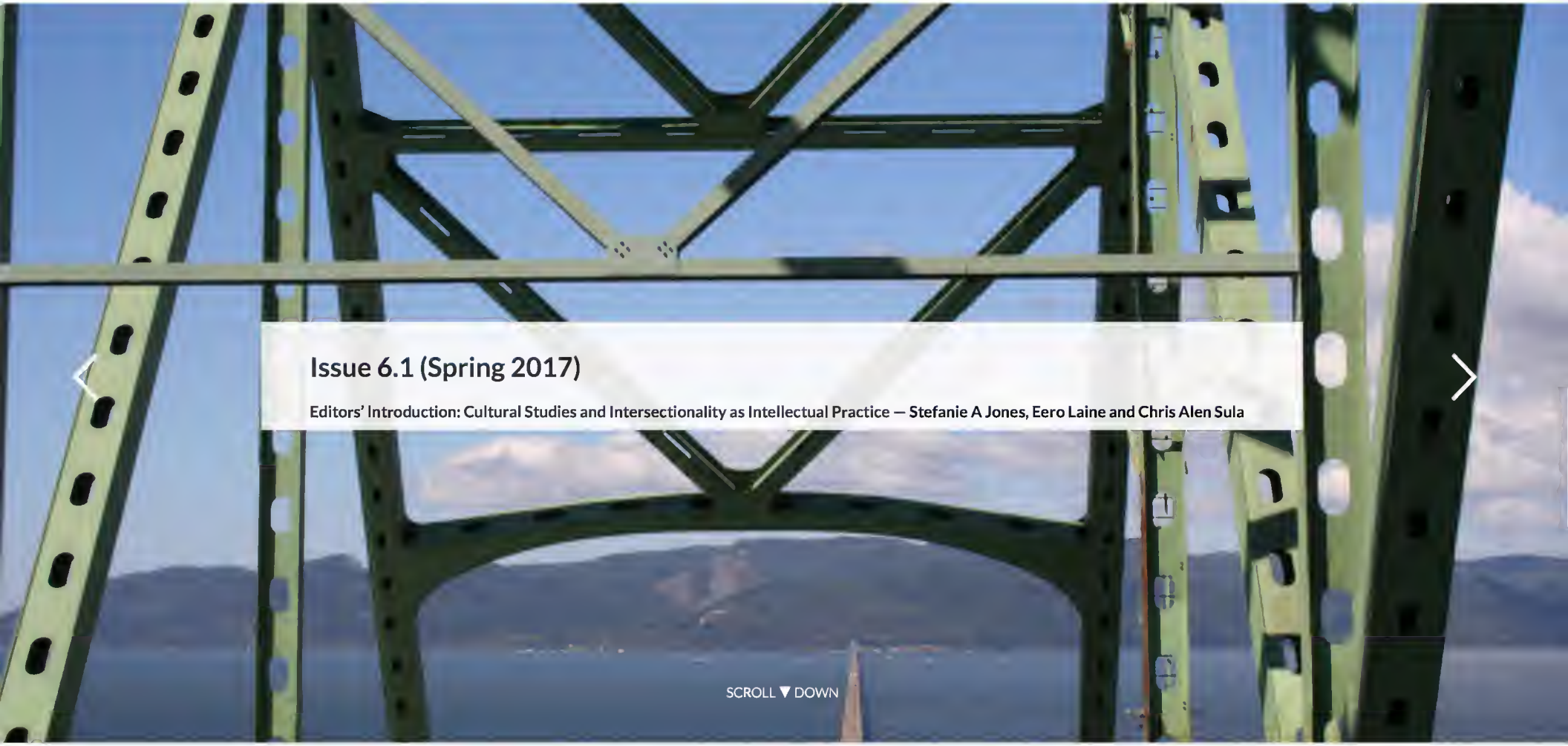
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Issue 6.1 (Spring 2017)

Editors' Introduction: Cultural Studies and Intersectionality as Intellectual Practice — Stefanie A Jones, Eero Laine and Chris Alen Sula

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Cover image: "Crossover" by Inalaf. Article images (from left to right, top to bottom): Marguerite Abouet (author) and Clément Oubrerie (illustrator), *Aya of Yopougon* Vol. 3, p. 71; still i
Magic Mike XXL (2015; dir. Gregory Jacobs); Chris Watt, "The Dunfermline Fulfillment Centre," Scotland; *Sexualidades Campesinas* website screenshot. Copyeditor: Anne Donl

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Issue 6.1 (Spring 2017)

Editors' Introduction: Cultural Studies and Intersectionality as Intellectual Practice

Stefanie A Jones, Eero Laine and Chris Alen Sula

ABSTRACT As a "critical social theory," intersectionality already lies at the roots of contemporary cultural studies, and the best work in cultural studies has the capacity for or is already engaging with intersectionality as method. This is work that accounts for the multifaceted nature of subjects, institutions, processes, and structures as it asks its questions about cultural objects, experience, ideology, history, or discourses. Intersectionality as, along with dialectical materialism, a core intellectual practice of cultural studies, offers expanded possibilities for political traction, relevance to the world and people's lives, and transformative potential. We see models of such work throughout this issue, including with part two of a special forum on emergent analytics of critical humanities.

> We realize that the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy. We are socialists because we believe that work must be organized for the collective benefit of those who do the work and create the products, and not for the profit of the bosses. Material resources must be equally distributed among those who create these resources. We are not convinced, however, that a socialist revolution that is not also a feminist and anti-racist revolution will guarantee our liberation….We need to articulate the real class situation of persons who are not merely raceless, sexless workers, but for whom racial and sexual oppression are significant determinants in their working/economic lives.
>
> —Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement"[1]

More than just interdisciplinarity, intersectionality is first and foremost an insistence on the importance of always addressing racism and sexism also. The operations of power and oppression, described by women of color feminists eventually under the rubric of "intersectionality," function at the individual, social, cultural, institutional, and structural levels. Turning deliberately in the face of hegemonic interests, intersectionality accounts for and works against the patterns by which certain positions (white, cis-masculine, wealthy/bourgeois, temporarily-able-bodied, Western, heterosexual, citizen) remain preferred, authorized, and enriched today.

Conceived by black feminist thinkers in the 1970s and 1980s, and shaped by subsequent generations of women-of-color feminists, intersectionality is a rich philosophy of both experience and the material world. In 1981, bell hooks traced the origins of black feminist social theorizing to the nineteenth century, examining the theoretical and political work of Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, Amanda Berry Smith, and Sojourner Truth.[2] Throughout these speeches and writings, and continued significantly in and beyond hooks's work, black feminism engages with a theory of intersectionality, a way of expanding a single-narrative or even an additive frame of oppression into a theory of the social, cultural, and political-economic world. As Kimberlé Crenshaw demonstrated in the

text that coined the term intersectionality, "intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism;"[3] As Crenshaw elucidates, intersectionality is a framework meant to replace "single-axis" analysis (such as the sole focus on gender, race, or class) by accounting for multiple forms of oppression at the same time. In so doing, this framework is better able to address the concerns of those who are left out of single-axis analysis (those who occupy intersectional positions, such as women of color oppressed by both racism and sexism simultaneously), as well as the concerns of those who single-axis analysis is designed to address (white women, black men, etc.). Indeed, Crenshaw reveals that single-axis analysis is already intersectional, but that it obscures the ways in which it upholds certain oppressions while challenging one in particular. For example, feminism that does not address women of color does concern itself with both gender and race, but it obscures the fact that it defends white interests while working against patriarchal interests. Intersectionality, then, is a more accurate framework for depicting the multiple forms of oppression that already shape the world. Indeed, Patricia Hill Collins stressed the importance of seeing "black feminist thought as a critical social theory,"[4] as more than just a reflection of an individual viewpoint. Beyond recognizing a unique individual perspective (though often reduced to that[5]), this school of critical theory is actually the source of a variety of interventions in philosophical considerations of power, capital, and justice. Centering women of color when considering cultural studies questions provides a whole-world view that suggests a radical historicization of power, in conversation with the field's traditional Marxist roots.

Intersectionality, then, addresses not only the specific lives of black women who have been "socialized out of existence,"[6] but the specificities of human identities in general as the result of a multifaceted, yet mutually-constituted matrix of relations organized according to various inequitable power distributions. Collins's insights illuminate this world-organization further: "any matrix of domination can be seen as an historically specific organization of power in which social groups are embedded and which they aim to influence…. Thus, regardless of how any given matrix is actually organized either across time or from society to society, the concept of the matrix of domination encapsulates the universality of intersecting oppressions as organized through diverse local realities."[7] Understanding both humans and capital organized according to a complex of material interests (that which Collins calls a matrix of domination) that is historically and locally specific yet that can change over time, this black feminist philosophy challenges false a prioris at the root of previous critical theorizations of power. Taken up and extended in conversation with other feminisms and other antiracist critiques, intersectional critiques are foundational to the tradition of women of color feminism. [8]

Cultural Studies, Marxism, and Intersectionality

bell hooks's fundamental formulation "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" is a particularly useful approach for cultural studies because it emphasizes the structures that maintain and expand oppression.[9] As a "critical social theory," intersectionality already lies at the roots of contemporary cultural studies, and the best work in cultural studies has the capacity for or is already engaging with intersectionality as method. This is work that accounts for the multifaceted nature of subjects, institutions, processes, and structures as it asks its questions about cultural objects, experience, ideology, history, or discourses. On the other hand it is cultural studies' strength in the practice of dialectical materialism that forms this deep connection with intersectionality. As the world already contains the power inequities that manifest in daily lives as hierarchies of race, gender, sex, class, ability, nation, and sexuality, historical materialism can account for these inequities and hierarchies as they are. And the dialectical practice of historical materialism provides the capacity for the "both/and" that is so fundamental to accounting for multiple sources of

oppression. When deployed with historical accuracy, dialectical materialism cannot help but account for the intersections of a particular cultural object or historical moment in an whole-world way. The canon of cultural studies texts provides numerous examples, most notably from the Birmingham School tradition.[10]

This is not to reduce intersectionality to cultural studies; both fields have enough wide-ranging applications to diverge. Nor is it to reduce intersectional thought to Marxist thought; rather it is to recognize that intersectionality is already answering questions that Marxist thinking is asking, often with care and precision for historical reality that exceeds the impact of earlier Marxist scholars, even if the motivation for answering those questions sometimes arises from different places. Moving beyond the base-superstructure division, as much cultural studies has done, already entails a complication of the class-centered (class-only) framework of other kinds of Marxist scholarship. Simultaneously, intersectionality is clear to distinguish that work that is not class-only neither becomes class-exceptional; questions of capital remain inextricably tied to intersectional analyses.

Indeed, this is one of the distinctive strengths of intersectionality as the foundation for contemporary studies of culture. Intersectionality as intellectual practice provides a means to work through some of the contradictions that arise from interdisciplinary work, to move beyond the standstills or counter-productive activities that arise when there are competing interests in work against injustice. Intersectionality as intellectual practice demands a "both/and" response to such points of contradiction. And intersectionality as intellectual practice demands a certain centering of priorities that also works not to reproduce the logics of oppression that form intellectual inquiry itself. What does it mean to fight for justice for black people against the US's systematic practice of antiblackness (such as police brutality), when faced with critiques of the US itself as delegitimate because of its status as settler colony? The both/and possibilities of intersectionality demand that we imagine justice for both black people and indigenous people simultaneously. Collaborations between American Indian Movement and Black Lives Matter organizers in St. Paul, Minnesota provide a potential model for one kind of intersectional response.[11] How do survivors of sexual assault respond to the violence they have endured, intervene in ongoing patriarchal violence, and heal, without recourse to the racialized policing and imprisonment system? Intersectional organizing for transformative justice and community accountability address these contradictions.[12] Two different approaches may each be informed by the specific form of injustice they are combating and thus may be directly at odds; structural intersectionality can provide the common ground from which to begin to imagine alternatives that work productively against injustice from multiple angles simultaneously.

Looking Forward

It is vital to note here that intersectionality as an intellectual practice for cultural studies does not just mean including a chapter on race and another on gender in a book about class and capitalism. To treat Collins's "critical social theory" with the necessary rigor means recognizing and beginning from the understanding that studies of capitalism are always also studies of white supremacy and the cis-patriarchy.[13] This may mean disrupting comfortable methodologies, upending traditional research practices, and reorganizing our global and whole-world frameworks so that we begin, informed by updated understandings of existing conditions, to ask new questions (even if those questions are only subtly different).

There are several key challenges facing future work. The first is the emphasis on the material. For example, it requires theoretical nuance and careful work to hold both the

constructed nature of race with the material consequences of racial hierarchy, but such balance is necessary to remain specific about historical materiality. While black feminism's intersectionality theory is a uniquely insightful political philosophy, it has not always been utilized in this way. Black feminist scholars have critiqued the way the term has been taken up as a general feminist project without attention to the black women and the feminist anti-racism at its roots.[14] Without addressing the fullness of this as an intellectual and political project, whiteness often subsumes and replaces any women-of-color feminism within intersectionality. When this white-centrism works with the reduction of black feminism from a critical social theory, a philosophical intervention into the nature of the contemporary world, to only a theorization of identity, it loses its capacity for theorizing power and justice in a material way. When used as a superficial celebration of individuality and difference, intersectionality can become imbricated with individualism and American exceptionalism. At times, intersectionality can be used (perversely) to serve rather than subvert hegemonic political interests. And speaking of matter, the material constraints of the academy, in particular its labor demands for legible, pro-capitalist scholarship, are part of disciplining the interdisciplinary cultural studies. Such demands limit which scholars doing which work can succeed, be employed, and receive tenure. In order for intersectional work to thrive, the field must grow. This means more faculty lines and more graduate and undergraduate students in more departments in more institutions dedicated to cultural studies work.

And finally, there are two key challenges regarding points of intersection themselves that we would like to highlight. First, one of the logics by which white supremacy operates is the continued displacement of the question of ending racism, and in particular of ending anti-black racism. We challenge future work in the field to turn against this logic by foregrounding questions of racial hierarchy when considering capitalism, the patriarchy, and heteronormativity. Second, ablism thoroughly shapes the academy. While the digital publication of this journal aids with access in certain ways, the shape of acceptable scholarship and thought production radically restricts the participation of many. While disability justice scholars (often informed by an intersectional feminist tradition, as indeed the divisions of access and ability are deeply informed by and inform race, class, gender, and nation) have done much work on this front, too much remains to be done. We challenge future work in the field to creatively and zealously upend this process of hierarchizing bodies and minds. We believe that these changes are necessary, and that our collective capacity as intellectuals and professionals is vast enough to survive these upheavals.

While there are certain challenges, the rewards are also promising, as this issue attests. Intersectionality as, along with dialectical materialism, a core intellectual practice of cultural studies, offers expanded possibilities for political traction, relevance to the world and people's lives, and transformative potential. We see models of such work throughout this issue, beginning with the second part of the special forum on emergent analytics of critical humanities. As forum editors Chris A. Eng and Amy K. King note in their introductory remarks, Part I of the forum emphasizes this theory as practice by "placing the intersectional experiences of people's lived materialities at the center of..scholarship and classrooms." The essays and responses of Part II of the forum continue this work. Sami Schalk and Jina B. Kim take up critical disability studies, in conversation with Julie Avril Minich. Taking up institutionality along with Jodi Melamed are pieces by Leland Tabares and Tanja Aho. Chad Shomura and Michelle N. Huang think alongside Kyla Wazana Tompkins on new materialisms. And, in conversation about settler colonialism with J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, are essays by Beenash Jafri and Melissa Gniadek.

Our lead article by andré m carrington does a reparative reading of the small-scale

potentials of the graphic novel Aya of Yopougon. In this careful approach to understanding Aya, carrington demonstrates how the graphic novel subtly renders a past post-colonial Africa and African Diaspora that is playful and diversionary, and that is opposed to overdetermined representations of African societies and Africans in Diaspora. carrington argues that this project of "novelty" shapes the work and shows how Aya makes "desirable possibilities" broadly legible in a way that undermines the sedimentation that defines life under neoliberalism.

Broderick Chow examines the "racialized exclusions of entrepreneurial ideology" through the film series Magic Mike. By focusing on how performance hinges together race, capital, sexuality, and bodies, Chow argues that the "magic" of sexual expression and capital enrichment that constitutes male stripping is only possible through the appropriation of black labor.

Lindsay Weinberg's article considers target marketing, which segments advertising to consumers according their demographic data, buying habits, preferences, or location. Attending to the material logistics of the practice, Weinberg argues that target marketing operates as risk management technology rather than uncompensated labor, and serves as a source of monopoly data from which corporations can extract rents. Target marketing saves labor and reduces risk for corporations by providing information that can help capitalists predict user behavior, control consumer choices (especially in ways that reproduce extant power hierarchies), and tailor employment commitments to advance precarity.

Tania Lizarazo, Elisa Oceguera, David Tenorio, Diana Pardo Pedraza, and Robert McKee Irwin reflect on digital storytelling in Sexualidades Campesinas, a critical public humanities focused on issues of sexual diversity among rural farm workers of California's Central Valley and Central Coast regions. Their essay points to "the 'multivoicedness' of digital narratives, alluding to the intersectionality and instability of identity (e.g. lesbian/farmworker/mother/Mexican immigrant)" and questions the academic–public divide that pervades much scholarship.

Notes

1. Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement" in Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2015), 214.
2. bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1981).
3. Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 140 (1989), 140.
4. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 31.
5. See, for one recent example, Nancy Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (New York: Verso, 2013).
6. hooks, *Ain't I A Woman*, 7.
7. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 228.
8. Some key foundational texts include Barbara Smith, *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983); Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2015); INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, eds., *Color of Violence: The Incite! Anthology* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press,

2006); and Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1982).

9. hooks, *Ain't I A Woman*, 190. This text is the first of hooks's to explore this term, which appears and is expanded throughout hooks's oeuvre.
10. Such as Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (Hong Kong: Macmillan Press, 1982); and Hazel V. Carby, *Cultures in Babylon: Black Britain and African America* (New York: Verso, 1999).
11. At a July 8, 2016 rally for Philando Castile in St. Paul, MN, Black Lives Matter Minneapolis activists discussed how the American Indian Movement provided community security for their events and actions after a well-publicized violent attack by white supremacists made community members afraid to attend. Mark Vancleave, "Five People Were Shot Near Black Lives Matter Protest Site," *Star Tribune* November 24, 2015, accessed May 15, 2017 http://www.startribune.com/several-people-were-shot-near-black-lives-matter-protest-site/353121881.
12. Mariame Kaba, "Transformative Justice," *Prison Culture*, March 12, 2012, accessed May 15, 2017, http://www.usprisonculture.com/blog/transformative-justice.
13. See, for examples of this work, Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1983); and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).
14. For this analysis, see Patricia Hill Collin's talk "With My Mind Set on Freedom: Black Feminism, Intersectionality and Social Justice" given on receipt of the Gittler Prize, October 29, 2013, Goldfarb Library, Brandeis University. Hazel Carby also notes in another critique: "The cultural, political, and social complexity of black people is consistently denied in those strands of feminist and multicultural theory that emphasize 'difference' and use it to mark social, cultural and political differences as if they were unbridgeable human divisions." Carby, *Cultures in Babylon*, 249.

Bio



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SAJ is a McNair scholar, an organizer, and an educator, and received their doctorate from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. SAJ has published in edited collections and *Theatre Journal* and has taught at Brooklyn College, Hunter College, the College of Staten Island, Marymount Manhattan College, and New York University. SAJ's research explores war, white supremacy, twenty-first century capitalist economies, and the connections between class formation and political practice.

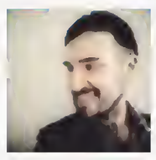
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Issue 6.1 (Spring 2017)

Minor Miracles: Toward A Theory of Novelty in *Aya of Yopougon*

andré m. carrington

ABSTRACT This essay undertakes a reparative reading of *Aya of Yopougon,* a multivolume graphic novel by Marguerite Abouet and Clément Oubrerie. Setting *Aya* alongside other African comics and prevailing interpretations of African and Diasporic literatures, this interpretation coins the term "novelty" to describe the unique mode of representing subjects, space, and time in the text. This "novelty" situates Aya at the intersection of tendencies in African, European, and North American comics art, and it juxtaposes subtle renditions of everyday life with overdetermined representations of African societies and Africans in Diaspora. The essay also articulates the relevance of novelty for feminist, queer, and postcolonial theories, comics scholarship, and Diaspora Studies.

Aya of Yopougon is a bande dessinée (BD, or graphic novel in North American parlance) in six volumes. Originally published in French in 2005, it is the story of a young woman and her peers coming of age in the West African nation of Côte d'Ivoire at the end of the 1970s, during a period referred to as the "Ivorian Miracle." Originally published in France by Ivorian-born author Marguerite Abouet, with artwork by her husband, illustrator Clément Oubrerie, *Aya* has since been translated into over a dozen languages. It was the first work by an African author to win the Best First Album Award at the Angoulême International Comics Festival in France, and it has also been adapted into an animated film[1]

This article aims to contribute to a relatively recent move in feminist and queer approaches to literature and popular culture that value "weak" rather than "strong" theoretical priorities. Amid strong theories of postcolonial and queer diasporic cultural production that identify newly ascendant historical forces as the causes for emergent patterns in narrative, I appraise *Aya* as a popular text of a different color—its representation of postcolonial Africa and Africans in diaspora portrays "novelty" rather than determination. I coin the term novelty here to describe how Abouet and Oubrerie's work contrives impressions of everyday life whose aggregate effect is comparatively humble: its imaginative vision works toward the potential to surprise observers and interpretants. This orientation toward potentiality is an alternative to a more systematic, knowing agenda invested in determinacy; whereas the former lends itself to theories concerned with poesis, the quotidian, and concrete description, the latter tends toward global and prescriptive theories that correlate cultural forms with historical developments in more decisive terms.

While "correlationism" has come under scrutiny in contemporary philosophy, my interpretation of *Aya* as a text amenable to weak theory is agnostic toward these debates. The contrast between a weak theory of novelty and a strong theory of political efficacy echoes Isaiah Berlin's classic treatment of the parable of the fox and the hedgehog: the fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing. Novelty appeals to the multifarious, cosmopolitan aptitudes of contemporary African diasporic authorship as a discursive formation that eludes the power of nation and capital in subtle ways but does

not altogether escape them. Rather than realizing the impact of decolonization or neoliberalism on the medium of the graphic novel, *Aya* synthesizes conventions from a variety of visual and narrative traditions to address a heterogeneous readership. In keeping with the tendency of market-watchers and cultural critics who cite the fox/hedgehog distinction, my interpretation of *Aya* "does so in order to celebrate the virtues of being a fox."[2] The analogy operates here to distinguish my weak theorization of novelty in *Aya* from the systematic approaches to postcolonial African and diasporic literature that apply to various moments in the graphic novel. *Aya* facilitates the elaboration of an eclectic repertoire for contemporary African diasporic authors and artists who are learned in many traditions rather than inaugurating a new school.

This article discusses how *Aya of Yopougon* eludes the "symptomatic" reading strategies characteristic of strong theories. A deterministic model of the relationship between textual forms and their conditions of possibility would trace features of the African diasporic graphic novel to the post-Cold War realignment of African governance characterized by the rise of multi-party states and multilateral agreements, the decentering of colonial legacies and neocolonial discourses by new media practices and postcolonial critique, and the proliferation of new relations to national identity. Although these hypotheses pertain to some qualities of *Aya* that it shares with other texts, they are founded on a certainty about the present that *Aya* disavows by turning to the past. Strong theories and the reading practices to which they give rise "confer epistemological authority on the analytic work of exposure . . . which gives the critic sovereignty in knowing, when others do not, the hidden contingencies of what things really mean."[3] Reading *Aya* according to the hypothesis that no single epistemology of language, mediation, or subjectivity subsumes its significance is this article's means of ceding authority back to the intellectual milieu out of which it emerges.

As an object lesson in the value of a weak theory of cultural production, Abouet and Oubrerie's rendition of the past outlines an alternative to the challenges of the present that it cannot currently enunciate in the form of a political objective. Instead, it recalls a specific, "no longer conscious" moment at which a way of life beyond the contingencies of the present seemed possible.[4] I argue that the narrative does not lend itself to a program of interpretation or action that can bring about that way of life. It does not indict the forces that have made desirable realities from the past unattainable in the present, but it stages an intervention into the historiography of postcolonial Africa, nonetheless. Emphasizing its diversionary and ludic aims, my reading of *Aya* questions how the text redeploys facets of its setting to inspire plural ways of knowing the past rather than recommending particular directions for future action. Like vernacular speech, performance, self-fashioning, and other weakly articulated but familiar everyday knowledge practices, African comics "literally can't be seen as a simple repository of systemic effects imposed on an innocent world."[5]

I describe the text's production of novelty as an elusive rather than resistant strategy in order to specify its mode of addressing the political. I argue that *Aya*'s diversionary agenda rehearses a utopian tendency in culture akin to what José Esteban Muñoz terms "queer futurity."[6] *Aya* foregrounds the time and place called the "Ivorian Miracle" to divert the reader's attention away from the urgency of the here and now. It focuses instead on a "then and there" at which the most salient questions of the moment in which we live are markedly absent. This small-scale utopianism staves off the "ossifying effects of neoliberal ideology and the degradation of politics brought about by representations of queerness in contemporary popular culture."[7] Unlike what Muñoz terms abstract utopia—in which an ideal way of life emerges out of changes in social structures that can be understood at a high degree of abstraction—concrete utopia, a genus in which I argue queer futurity and

novelty are species, marks out the residual and ephemeral spaces where desirable possibilities become legible in everyday terms.

Although the narrative does not address them head-on, Abouet identifies negative portrayals of postcolonial Africa that prevail in Europe and North America as one of her motivations for writing *Aya*.[8] Alisia Grace Chase echoes this aim in her preface to the first volume of the text: "the western world is becoming increasingly aware of the myriad cultures on this massively diverse continent, but swollen bellied children, machete wielding *janjaweeds*, and too many men and women dying of AIDS continue to comprise the majority of visual images that dominate the Western media."[9] Acknowledging that contravening the dispiriting effects of dominant media imagery was one of *Aya*'s premises, I argue that its approach to addressing the ills of contemporary discourse on Africa and Africans in diaspora is "reparative," that is ameliorative, rather than corrective; it does not reveal and explain the unexplained but seeks to improve on conditions that are known to be unsatisfactory.

As Eve Sedgwick posited in coining the term reparative reading, the "hermeneutics of suspicion" that came to dominate critical theory in the twentieth century was only one of a number of possible interpretive orientations. Sedgwick derives the language of paranoid and reparative modes of interpretation, the methodological analogues to strong and weak theory, from the work of psychologist Silvan Tomkins. In the now-classic essay "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading," she writes that the program of knowing prescribed by strong theories is "monopolistic," placing all its faith in

> demystifying exposure: only its cruel and contemptuous assumption that the one thing lacking for global revolution . . . is people's (that is, other people's) having the painful effects of their oppression, poverty, or deludedness sufficiently exacerbated to make the pain conscious.[10]

Because the text seems to disavow any role in bringing about global revolution through the exposure of hidden sources of pain, my search for novelty in *Aya of Yopougon* admits into the sphere of valuable lessons the possibility that the text aims to mitigate the deleterious effects of dominant imagery on the cultural landscape by offering diversions from the harsh realities portrayed elsewhere. These diversions are grounded in everyday life and largely specific to the author's vantage point on recent history.

My reading of *Aya* concurs in the hypothesis of the "Ivorian Miracle" that Abouet advances rather than calling it into question. This setting asks readers to be credulous about the past by foregoing speculation about its relationship to the present. Whereas symptomatic reading is concerned, even obsessed, with successfully arriving at irrefutable explanations for far-ranging phenomena, weak theories take an interest in appreciating what cultural endeavors intend to achieve locally and learning from what happens when they seem to fail.[11] My reading of *Aya* therefore resists scrutinizing Abouet and Oubrerie's rendition of the Ivorian Miracle along the lines of success or failure, downplaying the issue of whether their reconstruction of the epoch corresponds to evidentiary accounts. Instead, I explore how the text seeks to confer a wider array of images of postcolonial Africa and Africans in diaspora to the political imaginary of readers and critics.

My interpretation of *Aya* takes a reparative approach by framing Abouet and Oubrerie's rendition of the Ivorian Miracle as a reparative reading of the historical record. Like many French colonies, Côte d'Ivoire attained independence in 1960. But unlike its neighbors, the country levied high taxes on the small farms that produced cocoa and coffee for export, encouraged immigration, and saw remarkable economic growth as the cash crops

became more lucrative.[12] The economic miracle fueled capital accumulation within the country (and among foreign investors) without distributing the benefits of growth to all stakeholders equally. Cities like Yamoussoukro and Abidjan reaped the benefits, along with their prosperous suburbs like Abouet's childhood home, Yopougon.[13] *Aya* makes use of this uneven development not to draw contrasts or expose contradictions but to affirmatively identify a local context where signs of relative prosperity preponderate. The characteristics of that time and place, a vibrant Yop City, rationalize shared stability and low-stakes dynamism as contours within which the narrative can eschew considerations of deep poverty and structural conflict.

Insofar as life in upwardly-mobile Yop City is the point of departure for the characters' shared experiences, they share a common relation to their community. Within the constraints imposed by the circumscribed outlook on just what there is to represent, above, I examine how Abouet and Oubrerie "build small worlds of sustenance that cultivate a different present and future" for the ways of life they place on display.[14] The following discussion of *Aya of Yopougon* outlines its construction of novelty in the context of other African and diasporic texts, as well as comics produced elsewhere and relevant criticism, in order to elucidate the possibilities imagined in its pages.

There are three dimensions in which the text eludes symptomatic interpretations that would construct its features as effects of a singularly discernible structural phenomenon: language, form, and mobility. *Aya* corroborates several theories regarding "minor" literatures, including postcolonial African literature, but only in part, in its representations of speech. I discuss how aspects of the text that draw attention to its cultural specificity persist into its English translation and how it deploys rhetorical devices without conforming to any particular doctrine regarding the role of language in postcolonial cultural politics. Subsequently, I analyze *Aya*'s visual style in relation to globally influential comics traditions, addressing recent scholarly efforts to develop a more systematic perspective on African interventions in the medium.[15] Finally, my analysis concludes by reflecting on diasporic movements in the text, including Abouet's emigration from Côte d'Ivoire to France, with attention to the way these itineraries "underperform" emergent critiques of queer diaspora that encompass questions of economics, nationalism, and gendered and sexual identity.

Speaking of Modernity

Although it does not diagnose the legacy of the recent past through a symptomatic treatment, *Aya*'s Ivorian Miracle is not a distortion but a "double," a new quantity that is distinct from but similar to its antecedent. As Achille Mbembe has noted, discursive apparatus such as comics and speech create "doubles" with the capacity to participate in their respective discursive conventions.[16] Aya is not a proxy for Abouet within the text, but she is a double for the author function. Like the protagonists of other BD, she confers her name to the text's constituent parts and holds the narrative together on a formal level.[17]

Image 1: Page 18 of *Aya: Life in Yop City*. Copyright Abouet & Oubrerie. Aya: Life in Yop City. Used with permission from Drawn & Quarterly.

An important doubling within *Aya*'s rendition of the Ivorian Miracle is its representation of the educational system Ivorians have inherited from France. The studious Aya aspires to become a doctor, and she plans to attend university. She jokes that she does not want

to "wind up in the C-series."[18] This reference is a double entendre, invoking both the name of an actual course of study in French institutions that includes certain academic subjects (math and science) and another set of terms with trivial connotations: "combs, clothes, and chasing men."[19] The joke illustrates how young women coming of age view their options in the country's changing economy. Aya and her best friends Adjoua and Bintou, as thoroughly modern women, gently mock the idea that their future will be limited by gender, but they know that education could make the difference between full citizenship and economic equality with men, on the one hand, and disenfranchisement, on the other.

The individual terms in the phrase C-series translate efficiently from Francophone to Anglophone editions of the text—the original text is "*coiffure, couture, et chasse au mari*"—but the use of the term C-series does not. The partial translatability of the joke across cultural frames of reference marks this text with the specificity of its Francophone origins as well as the global reach of liberal feminism. Unlike certain modes of postcolonial discourse, the way *Aya* plays up the contradictions of official language, in this instance, provides the characters with a sense of continuity in their experience of the transition to a new phase of modernity. Here, Abouet makes use of what Mikhail Bakthin defines as "ritual laughter," which critic Marc Caplan describes as "a means by which a traditional culture makes productive use of its internal contradictions . . . a crucial defense mechanism in the reconfiguration of the tradition as a counterbalance to modernity."[20] In this instance, the "tradition" interrogated by the characters' discussion of career paths is a set of gender roles confronted by modern women in the course of achieving individual success independent from marriage. The transposability of the terms comprising the C-series results from the "carnivalesque" capacity of language to invoke contradictory concepts to the same signifiers: C-series might describe women who transgress gender norms to enter a learned profession, or it might belittle women who devote their formative years to superficial beauty pursuits. The same conversation could take place simultaneously among white teenagers in France; African, European, and North American women alike confront modernity by moving away from the same gendered traditional division of labor.

In an interview with Angela Ajayi, Abouet describes newfound autonomy among women as a consequence of the Ivorian Miracle; notably, she cites "access to the pill," a historically specific development typically associated with European and North American women's movements rather than those of the Global South.[21] Abouet's deployment of ritual laughter in reference to changing traditions associates Côte d'Ivoire with the rest of the Francophone world, but it echoes a strategy that some other African writers pursue by employing proverbs to represent culturally specific oral traditions persisting in the face of colonial and neocolonial influences. The appearance of proverbs in literary texts can elicit ritual laughter by situating local knowledge practices structured by oral traditions on the written page, representing the adaptability of tradition and its value as a resource in the process of modernization.[22]

Abouet occasionally makes use of proverbs in a fashion that serves this purpose, but she demonstrates the exception to this tendency through a character in a diasporic location. Because proverbs rely on the sharing of knowledge via oral communication, when an Ivorian character tries to use one in order to stop members of a French family from having an argument at the dinner table, his effort falls flat. The proverb, "Remember: an angry bull can't mount a cow in heat!" inspires quizzical expressions.[23] Without a shared episteme among the communicants and the reader that makes this proverb familiar, the encounter between Africans and Europeans becomes an unsettling moment in modernity rather than an occasion to affirm the value of tradition.

Authors including Côte d'Ivoire's Ahmadou Kourouma and Nigeria's Wole Soyinka, on the

other hand, employ what Caplan calls "deformative laughter," a frequently satirical comic repertoire that plays up the absurdities of colonial life and death in order to "undermine the modern order that has displaced tradition."[24] This strategy often involves transliterating words between African and European languages or exploiting homophony to expose the incoherence, from an indigenous frame of reference, of colonial discourse.[25] Caplan's account of deformative laughter is an artifact of a strong theory: it focuses on "subversive and demystifying parody, the detection of hidden patterns of violence and exposure."[26]

Once we identify deformative laughter as a symptom of hidden patterns of violence, the latter is likely to proliferate everywhere we look. Sedgwick associates the suspicions of critics invested in such a strong theory with the disposition she describes as paranoid reading. Rather than the subversive parody that arises out of the aforementioned writers' deformative uses of language, Abouet's manner of including culturally specific material in the text is better described in the straightforward terms of juxtaposition rather than more volatile terms like deformation. Juxtaposition, the placement of pictorial and other images, including words, in proximity to one another within a text is the definitive quality of comics across traditions, according to critic Scott McCloud. Regardless of the verbal language in use, juxtaposition provides the "grammar" of comics. It enables the reader to use protocols such as reading order (left to right in BD, right to left in manga) to apprehend the relationship of one part of the page to another.[27] Just as discrete elements on a page become meaningful through relations such as sequence and difference (e.g. the difference between verbal and pictorial images), the scenes, chapters, and narratives consist of cohesive sets of juxtaposed elements that readers learn to recognize through repetition and contextualization.[28]

Aya plays up internal contradictions within the verbal language in which it was composed, French, to achieve ritual laughter, suturing the meaning of tradition within a Francophone context. It carries this investment in a metropolitan sensibility across translations into other languages. But it translates aspects of the text that were not initially inscribed in the text in French in a much more discrete fashion. Across its many translations, *Aya* maintains a clear hierarchy between the elements conveyed through verbal language and amenable to translation, on the one hand, and the discursive objects identified with African sources, on the other. Using juxtaposition to suggest transparency, *Aya* reproduces and rationalizes order rather than pointing to instability or epistemic violence through its configuration of objects and their meanings. The somewhat idiomatic quality of the phrase "C-series," for instance, requires explanation within the flow of the narrative. The dialogue incorporating this term in the English edition of the book contains an asterisk referring to some English text at the bottom of the same page where characters speak the phrase. On the scale of the book-length object as a whole, however, Abouet and Oubrerie relegate translations of Ivorian colloquialisms that occur on many pages to an extradiegetic site within each volume of the text.

There is a section at the end of each volume of *Aya* titled "Ivorian Bonus." The material in this section includes a glossary for words like *koutoukou* (a palm wine-based beverage) and *dêh* (an interjection), reinforcing their novelty for the presumptively non-African reader. Across the six volumes of *Aya*, the "Ivorian Bonus" delivers educational, cultural, and biographical background information. Highlights include a recipe for peanut sauce and a discussion of the care of newborns in Ivorian households. Separated from the narrative by a page that features a silhouette of the African continent on which the only detail is an outline of the borders of Côte d'Ivoire, the Ivorian Bonus is a reminder that the translation and circulation of texts as commodities for a differentiated reading public accrues ideological implications that might countermand either strong or weak

theoretical accounts of their contents. Book covers, prefaces and epilogues, and consumer-oriented packaging can flatten out the nuances of African and Asian writers' works published in European and North American languages.[29] Perhaps out of its authors' sense that centers and peripheries take shape despite readers' best efforts to resist them, the physical structure of each volume of *Aya* inscribes central and peripheral reading protocols in which whatever is universally legible, generically African, characteristically Francophone, or specifically Ivorian about the text can be apprehended through a simplifying, didactic mode that addresses the reader directly. Knowledge flows through the text in ways that are inflected by market imperatives and also contrived by the author and her collaborators, making it as plausible to describe *Aya*'s uses of verbal language in the weak theoretical terms of novelty, ritual laughter, and the "bonus" or supplement, rather than conscripting it into a stronger theorization of the conditions of its legibility that would implicate a wide array of other texts. The question of how to associate *Aya* with other comics is my concern below.

Reliable Narrators and Formal Novelty

The creation of *Aya* as a synergistic collaboration between Abouet and Oubrerie, neither of whom had ever previously worked in the medium, goes a short way toward explaining *Aya*'s novelty among BD.[30] However, the features of *Aya* that mark it as a unique creative synthesis are better understood as signs of its continuity with the eclecticism that has informed African comics since their inception. Recounting the developments in African print cultures that have led up to contemporary examples, Massimo Repetti notes that independence from European colonialism gave way to the global influence of American mass culture, including comics.[31] While he positions the globally-ascendant form of the graphic novel at the end of this genealogy, *Aya* displays many qualities suggestive of autonomy or even anachronism rather than a progression of forms that culminates in the present configuration of the text.

The most ubiquitous form of comics in the first half of the twentieth century were comic strips from the "funnies" sections of U.S. newspapers, which provided the template for African artists to introduce their first "paper heroes."[32] The broad-based adoption of this mode of dissemination for African comics differentiates them from the specialist periodicals, anthologies, and book-length albums that represent the medium prominently in Europe and Japan. Newly independent Africans also produced "politico-hagiographic" comics about their national heroes. The propagandistic iconography of these comics resurfaces in diaspora in the work of Nigerian-born, US-educated British illustrator, Tayo Fatunla.[33] Abouet's nostalgia for Houphouëtism operates in the background for most of *Aya*, but national iconography resurfaces momentarily at the end of the narrative.[34] Nonetheless, as I will discuss below, the same apparatus used to venerate national leaders and their values also lends itself to dissident caricatures and irreverence.

Another invention of African comics artists was the rendition of oral narratives in graphic form, which emerged in conjunction with orally derived literary texts by the likes of Djibril Niane. A generation of critics including Amadou Koné, Henry Louis Gates, and Achille Mbembe has problematized the Western tendency to view the influence of orality on African literatures solely in terms of traditionalism. These critics revalorize the evolving sophistication of modern African and Black diasporic speech and writing, and they draw attention to the material factors that make publishers, translators, and readers adhere to reified concepts of authenticity.[35] Mbembe, using the example of BD from Cameroon, explains how African cartoonists' most transgressive images profane the otherwise consecrated value of language in oral cultures. Conceptualizing the place of comics in societies where orality has played a paradigmatic role in shaping the public sphere allows us to comprehend what artistic license means for African artists in concrete terms.

Mbembe insists that in orality-based language communities, "speech being the very foundation of experience and the primary form of knowledge," concepts like "mere" rhetoric or "empty" words are oxymoronic.[36] Pictorial signification, particularly in the iconic register of images that resemble their referents, is especially liable to "annex and mime what it represents, while, in the very act of representation, masking the power of its own arbitrariness, its own potential for opacity, simulacrum, and distortion."[37]

Okwui Enwezor takes Mbembe's argument to imply that, when pictorial signs are forms of speech, "the comic functions not as an autonomous text, but as one manifestly tethered to the political sphere. In the context of the climate of political repression . . . such a mode of expression can be taken as an excess of speech, as speech that exceeds the limits of its tolerability."[38] The limits of political speech are, by definition, hard to discern except through their exceptions. Al'Mata, an artist who fled the Democratic Republic of Congo after his caricatures of then-President Mobutu Sese Seko placed him at risk, notes that "fear of repercussions limited creativity."[39] In conversations with critics, a number of comics artists suggest that heterogeneous African print cultures first arose in societies transitioning to multiparty systems in the 1990s. The comics printed in postcolonial periodicals could venture beyond nationalist doctrines to broach important new themes as their resident states shook off Cold War polarization and the outsize influence of apartheid South Africa. In Côte d'Ivoire, publications like *Ivoire Dimenche* and *Fraternité Matin* that had introduced "paper heroes" for the previous era gave way to *Gbich*. The latter featured satirical figures, like "the unrelentingly lethargic" Jo Bleck and the corrupt policeman Sergent Deux Togos, who are decisively less than heroic.[40]

The process of repression giving way to liberalization, to which the texts above attest, offers a compelling metanarrative that makes *Aya*'s diminished ideological force seem right on time. But *Aya* is also informed by divergences from this trajectory. Comics from the 1970s and 1980s, before the rise of multiparty governments across the continent that Repetti diagnoses as the condition of possibility for new developments, show that pluralism and political commentary had already prevailed on the pages of African periodicals. *Lagos Weekend* depicted Wakaabout, "a combination of flanêur and urban detective, a phantom floating unseen through the murky depths of the city and the corridors of governmental power."[41] Dakar's *Le Cafard Libéré* introduced the enduring underdog Goorgoorlou, "treat[ing] subjects such as inflation, politics, urban unrest and the popularity of local rap music."[42] Although there may be more texts like *Aya* in circulation in the present, this is not necessarily because they were impossible to produce in the past; geographic rather than temporal forces might account for the divergent attitudes toward African politics seen in comics. The Nigerian and Senegalese comic strips above made controversies visible at a time when their counterparts in other countries did not, indicating that local and national factors, rather than continental or global political shifts, dictate the circumstances for the production of print and visual culture. *Aya*'s diasporic point of origin may account for its neighborhood-level setting, its meek politics, and its long form.

The most influential comics emerging out of the Europe and the United States took the form of the comic strip, the English equivalent of the phrase "bande dessinée." These comics, printed within publications featuring other kinds of texts, "rely above all on the presence of a re-occurring character who becomes a close friend of the reader."[43] According to the influential theories of French BD pioneer Rodolph Töpffer, comics create familiarity for readers by simplifying representation to its most essential graphic elements. Hence, characters can wear the same clothes and hairstyles and bear no signs of aging—even for generations at a time—because their consistency makes the changing situations in which they find themselves appear novel. The winged helmet and bulbous

nose of Asterix, Little Lulu's button-hole eyes and tiny cap, Goorgoorlou's shaved head and his conical hat all remain intact whether the characters experience incredible drama or simple quotidian travails. For some comics that divide the labors of artist and writer, "the more distinctly and simplistically the character is drawn, the easier it is for the scriptwriter to come up with imaginative scenarios."[44] Recognizable characters can bring continuity to otherwise disparate components of a text, just as unreliable narrators can cast their coherence into doubt. Across the separate regions of the page and the many pages of a longer text, "the first thing the reader does when he or she approaches a comic strip frame is to look for the character."[45]

By contrast, more individualized illustrations, like Oubrerie's style in *Aya*, can imbue characters with individuality at the expense of a certain "universality" of appeal. Töpffer's theories suggest that representing characters' visual distinctiveness "schematically," through caricature, corresponds to the attenuation of specificity in the visual representation of their environments. Hence, as long as the characters are present, we only need to see those elements of background detail that are essential to the narrative. In this way, caricature provides a sort of "shorthand" through which comics can emulate the narrative functions performed by sentences in "certain novel-related literature, in particular the intimate style of writing that favours intuition over analysis and fleeting impression rather than description."[46] Accordingly, "the artist need no more repeat elements of décor, such as a chair, than would a novelist need mention the chair in every sentence."[47] If all images are "effectively an extension of the character" in comics that rely on cartoon-like renditions of persons, then we might expect comics specify their characters' features with more verisimilitude to display a concomitant tendency to flesh out the visual details of the situations they illustrate. This is precisely the case in *Aya*: characters' appearances are different in more than superficial ways, and the physical environments where their actions take place are virtually always illuminated in detail.

Comics artist Jean-Claude Forest, creator of *Barbarella*, contends that a maximally-simplified visual style liberates the writer to create "imaginative scenarios" for the characters.[48] Abouet and Oubrerie do not pursue the far-fetched range of situations that a simplified mode of visual composition would afford to the narrative; this may be a function of the text's realism. Yet short, serial comics that are set in everyday circumstances rather than wide-ranging adventures, like Schultz's *Peanuts* and the early twentieth-century BD *Bécassine*, rely on much simpler drawings than those of *Aya*, reducing the facial features and costume of characters to cartoon form and rendering their physical settings extremely sparse. To address *Aya*'s relatively detailed pictorial imagery, which is comparatively labor-intensive for the artist and the reader, in reparative terms, I suggest characterizing its visual style in terms of the presence of novelty rather than the lack of economy or efficiency.

Abouet describes her motivation for writing a graphic novel by inverting Forest's account of the creative process: "my writing process rests mainly on creating character portraits . . . and my imagination is fed by their interactions. In addition, I am also very much at ease with dialogue, and this is why graphic novels came easily to me; the style is similar to theatre."[49] The analogy to theatre is telling, because unlike the "novel-related modes of writing" that Töpffer compares to comics, in which details (furniture, décor) that appear in earlier sentences need not be reproduced throughout a scene unless they are instrumental to the characters' actions, theatrical works constantly remind the audience of the spatial environments they represent, simply because the set and props are physically present on stage alongside the actors. Abouet's citation of theatre as a frame of reference distinguishes her approach from some recent scholarship on BD and comics in other European contexts, which derives much of its analytical language from film.[50]

Oubrerie's prior experience as an animator is conspicuously absent from Abouet's account, but his background encourages us to conceptualize *Aya* as a work that "casts" characters in a performance and sets them in motion according to the author's designs.

Repetti describes *Aya* as part of a "trend . . . away from an age in which comics were confined to daily papers and magazines to one founded on the centrality of the book."[51] Although he credits greater professional autonomy and new relationships with European presses like Abouet's publisher, Gallimard, with the rise of African graphic novels, these material factors do not prescribe the style of illustration seen on Oubrerie's pages. By Repetti's own account, many comics that emerged in strip form through periodicals like *Gbich!* and those that yield the first self-contained (short-form) comic books in Africa utilize a style of illustration informed by European colonial print cultures: *ligne claire*. *Ligne claire* (literally "clear line") is a style of line drawing that "uses stark black outlines [of equal weight] both for the characters and for surrounding objects, avoiding any blurring effects."[52] It is a highly recognizable formal device that facilitates graphic simplicity, making it amenable to the aforementioned techniques for emphasizing characters over background details.

Precisely because *ligne claire* defines the content of the particular comics narratives that have become familiar across the globe—most notably, Hergé's *Tintin*—this style has also played an integral role in defining the form by populating the pages of albums that are disseminated globally in many languages.[53] Thus, while *ligne claire* operates efficiently in comic strips, it is also a distinguishing feature of the "centrality of the book" among comics creators in the African context and elsewhere.[54] Citing the "rapid rate at which global cultural forms are indigenized by African comics authors," Repetti notes that African artists' use of the *ligne claire* "is not necessarily a sign of their desire to adapt to the European-oriented mainstream."[55] Some of the most radical experiments in the graphic arts use styles influenced by the *ligne claire* to ironic effect by conveying ambiguous and irreverent messages in an apparently straightforward mode of representation. Laurence Grove refers to the Pop Art of Lichtenstein and Warhol as examples of this tendency, and Conrad Botes uses the style to illustrate racial and sexual anxieties drawn from South African life.[56] Contrary to a deterministic interpretation of the relationship between visual style, narration, and publishing format, African BD displays an incredible range of variations in form and content at the level of the page that attains yet another novel combination in *Aya*.

With the exception of political editorial cartoons, BD tends to consist of multiple "frames," or "panels." The French term for this page element is *case*, meaning "box," because the square is its most typical shape. The outline of a *case* is called a *cadrage*, and it separates the *case* from the negative space between panels. Because the *cadrage* is a boundary, it is not always visible, but in *Aya*, the *cadrage* is usually a thin, black, rounded rectangle that appears hand-drawn. To contextualize this stylistic choice, consider how several comics artists whose works are catalogued by the *Africa e Mediterraneo* project negotiate the configuration of panels on the page. Each *case* in Asimba Bathy's "Kinshasa" is rectangular, at right angles, but they vary in height and width to give a sense of space and perspective in relation to the human scale.[57] Samuel Mulokwa's "Komerera" deploys wide rectangular panels, some of which bleed to the edge of the page and some that dynamically overlap with or are completely inset within others, challenging the reader's perception of sequence.[58] These examples of page designs across contemporary African BD cast the distinctly narrow range of layouts throughout *Aya* in stark relief.

Image 2: Page 147 of *Aya: Love in Yop City*. Copyright Abouet & Oubrerie. Aya: Love

in Yop City. Used with permission from Drawn & Quarterly.

In *Aya*, the break from a typical layout that consists of six panels on each page to an occasional full-page-sized illustration makes certain scenes especially dramatic. For instance, Oubrerie affords a full page to the scene of Bintou walking toward a luxury hotel that towers over her small figure, but it is the "negative space" of the sky at sunset that demands attention.[59] A romantic scene featuring Adjoua and her lover walking on a starlit beach nearly takes up the entire page, but it is abruptly punctuated by a small *case* that takes up its bottom right corner. In this *case*, Adjoua reappears in the daytime.[60] The new scene takes the place of a supplement that, but for the apparent passage of time, would explain what transpired during the night. Later, a full page depicts the emigrant Inno and his love interest, Sebastien, in facing seats in a compartment on a French train. Their dialogue balloons appear at the top of the *case*, and they are seated against the window in natural light while other persons on the train are ensconced in shadow.[61] The vastness of the image creates the impression that they are traveling in relative silence, with their words floating above them, and the use of color and shadow to differentiate their figures from others contributes to the impression that they are drawn together. In the context of the text as a whole, and in relation to other BD, these page-sized illustrations achieve novel effects.

Image 3: Page 269 from *Aya: Love in Yop City*. Copyright Abouet & Oubrerie. Aya: Love in Yop City. Used with permission from Drawn & Quarterly.

In addition to his negotiation of page layouts to evoke temporal, spatial, and affective shifts throughout the text, Oubrerie employs hatching and shading as well as color in his illustrations of individual persons, places, and objects. Comics worldwide differ widely in their uses of color, from black-and-white to grayscale to painted or digital palettes, sometimes according to the chromatic options of their publication formats. In *Aya*, sometimes hues are linked to emotion—green for disgust, red for anger. More often, however, color realistically represents the light in an environment and its reflection off the objects depicted. While *ligne claire* neutralizes the interaction between color and line, colors only appear fully saturated in *Aya* in scenes that represent direct sunlight outdoors or artificial lighting overhead, such as office buildings or classrooms. Accordingly, the repertoire of colors conveys variations in the brightness and direction of light, and even diffusion through translucent objects, like sunlight passing through leaves.[62]

Color makes Abouet's characters come alive in another fashion: by illustrating the individual nuances of their bodies. In addition to applying color to the task of representing how Black skin tones are diverse, in the aggregate, Abouet and Oubrerie depict them in a range of attire.[63] Departing from a norm that makes characters quickly recognizable based on virtual "uniforms" that never change, characters in *Aya* dress for their social situations. Men employed in corporate offices wear suits and ties to work, but they change in and out of them at home; each of the principal characters wears a variety of dresses, skirts with tank tops, undergarments, jewelry and other accessories, and occasionally, disguises. A scene in which Aya's cohorts provide a makeover for the much-maligned Isidorine dramatizes the importance of fashion to comic effect.[64]

Discussing the material culture depicted in the text, Angela Ajayi remarked to Abouet, "the modern (telephones, fancy dresses, and cars from Paris, etc) and the traditional (wearing of traditional waxed cloth-like pagne, etc) seem to coexist well and without much friction . . . you seem to be saying something about the impact of modernity."[65] Abouet

agrees; in the first "Ivorian Bonus," she explains that clothing styles shown in the text are not fixed by identity or determined by historical conditions, per se, but changed at will. One page depicts the friendly face of Adjoua advising readers not to expect different characters to wear the same prints, because "every pattern has a meaning."[66] Like the intricate geometric designs worn by characters whose skin is monochromatically black in the comics drawn by Ivorian artist Amanvi, depictions of the human figure wearing patterned textiles can call attention to the expressivity of the clothed body.[67] When multiple patterns are combined, particularly with different colors, it can also create "a completely baroque expression of movement."[68] In relation to examples in contemporary African urban fashion and visual culture, Abouet and Oubrerie's representations of personal attire from the 1980s are comparatively understated, diminishing the impression that Yop City's prosperity anticipated the dynamism of the present.

Without any prophetic implications, Oubrerie's work gives life to Abouet's vision of an optimistic Côte d'Ivoire where the possibilities are not quite endless, but contained within capacious boundaries. The resourcefulness of everyday life as a source of knowledge emerges through subtle variations in the representation of events and incidental juxtapositions that are affecting, but not jarring. In the concluding section of this discussion, I address how the author positions her account of where her generation of Ivorians fit into the modern world in a similar fashion.

The Romance of Diaspora

Like the issues of textual and visual form, above, the question of precisely how Abouet's location in diaspora informs her representation of the Ivorian Miracle benefits from considerations of "cosmopolitanism and specificity."[69] Repetti and Naomi Schroth make these qualities central to their treatments of African comics, laying the foundation to extend them into diaspora. First and foremost, we should consider how Abouet conceptualizes movements from Côte d'Ivoire to France—including her own and those of her characters—in relation to the task of historical interpretation entailed by her reconstruction of the Ivorian Miracle as a setting. To that effect, I would argue that Abouet enlists twin narratives of diasporic migration in the task of rendering the Ivorian Miracle as a discrete time and space through which Africans arrive in Europe. One of these movements takes place within the narrative as the journey of a character named Innocent, while the other appears implicitly, but in an equally clear role, as a supplement to the text. The latter—Abouet's journey—appears as a vignette addressed directly to the reader in *Aya*'s final "Ivorian Bonus." In her personal reflection, Abouet recounts how she moved to France without a visa in 1983 in order to rationalize her portrayal of Innocent doing the same in the narrative. Linking these stories of migration in the text lends credence to the proposition that authors interested in making the weaker aspects of their work legible across cultural frames of reference employ intratextual gestures that amount to novelty, while leaving their strong, challenging, potentially contradictory implications exposed to more comprehensive approaches, such as queer theories of the nation and diaspora.

The relation between Abouet's diasporic authorship and Inno's homosexuality, which provides the impetus for his decision to emigrate, appears particularly significant in light of recent scholarship exploring the notion of queer diaspora. Gayatri Gopinath introduces this concept to interrogate the interconnectedness of seemingly disparate notions of sexuality and space: "in heteronormative logic the queer is seen as the debased and inadequate copy of the heterosexual, so too is diaspora within nationalist logic positioned as the queer Other of the nation, its inauthentic imitation."[70] An extensive disquisition on the sexual and spatial discourses that overlap on the pages of *Aya* is beyond the scope of this discussion, but I choose to conclude my analysis of *Aya* by considering how it

broaches the concerns that draw critics to queer diaspora as a strong theory.

In the interest of theorizing its novelty, I regard the internal differentiation within the text that *Aya* uses to specify the trajectories of its diasporic protagonists as one of the many ways it turns out to be out of step with more radical political gestures that we now know to be possible in culture. In the theoretical sense that employs "queer" as a verb and a descriptor for deconstructing and otherwise interrogating quite unstable foundations of subjectivity in the modern world, including modern cultures' preoccupation with binaries like the homo/heterosexual distinction, queer diaspora is something Abouet and Oubrerie don't.[71] Works that pursue this task lend credence to the hypothesis that "Queer times require even queerer modalities of thought."[72] Jafari Allen, for instance, concatenates the categories black/queer/diaspora to "argue for the recognition of black/queer/diaspora as at once a caution, a theory, and (most centrally) *a work*."[73] The theoretical endeavors animated by this understanding, with disparate subjects, e.g., *Queering the Color Line*, *Queering Medieval Genres*, etc., serve an urgent critical purpose. In the interest of "Queering West African Literatures," for example, Stephanie Newell's analysis draws on the work of Veronique Tadjo, an Ivorian author whose work "illustrates the manner in which 'queer' does not refer simply to the promotion of homosexual or lesbian relationships" by liberating female desire from patriarchal conventions, including the binary that structures gender identity.[74] Tadjo and other writers in Newell's study employ strategies more transformative than those of Abouet and Oubrerie, such as *écriture feminine*, to undermine discursive structures that render women's sexuality illegible.[75] These studies also demonstrate the instrumental value of non-Western locations in providing counternarratives to the terror of having "no framework in which to ask about the origins or development of individual gay [nonheteronormative] identity that is not already structured by an implicit, trans-individual Western project or fantasy of eradicating that identity."[76] Although readers may find that Abouet and Oubrerie's work presents a novel account of nonheteronormative desire among Africans and a novel treatment of the African presence in Europe, *Aya* offers no safe harbor from the fundamental dilemmas identified by queer theories, reinforcing the need for strong theories to deal with questions beyond the scope of minor literature.

Innocent's emigration occurs as a subplot across the last three volumes of *Aya*. His trajectory from Côte d'Ivoire to France, in which he is alienated at home and enticed by the promise of greater liberties abroad, hews closely to narratives of social mobility articulated in U.S. gay and lesbian liberal politics through the promise "It gets better." Although Inno and another young man, Albert, have engaged in homoerotic affection back in Yopougon, it was never possible for them to articulate male homosexual identities in the text. In order to rendezvous with Albert at the local lovers' lane, Inno dresses up in a wig and feminine attire so that other young people meeting under the stars will assume they are a straight couple. Inno's assumption of a feminine guise rehearses a prominent narrative in what Peter Jackson terms "global queering," which posits gender insubordination as a traditional analogue to cisgender male homosexuality and maps their relationship onto time and space by situating "underdeveloped" gender insubordination in the "developing" world. These narratives have "often presented a binary opposition between MTF transgenderism, imagined as a site of persistent, premodern, precapitalist 'tradition,' and gay forms of male homosexuality, represented as a domain of transgressive, Western-influenced, commodified modernity."[77] The more sophisticated queer critique of modernity Jackson and other critics have since embraced severs the relationship between "traditional transgenders" and modern "global gays," but *Aya* posits a singular sexual modernity that Côte d'Ivoire has not yet attained, requiring Inno to emigrate or remain stalled in his—and his nation's—progress. Indeed, when young Felicité discovers Albert and Inno's liaisons, she discloses to Aya that she witnessed them "in the

bedroom . . . playing . . . PAPA AND MAMAAAA!"[78] The infantile register in which Felicité communicates the scandal of their relationship suggests that homosexuality is not impossible, but *illegible*, in Ivorians' everyday life. These scenes of misrecognition impel Inno's pursuit of a cohesive gender and sexual identity in Paris.

Upon his arrival at Charles De Gaulle airport, when the Customs agent asks if he has anything to declare, Inno quips, "Nothing but myself."[79] He obtains a temporary visa—a convenience that many contemporary readers will require Abouet to demystify—and begins his new life. His newfound capacity to embody a cisgender male homosexual identity in France is cast in relief by his budding romance with a white Frenchman, Sebastien. Sebastien is gay, but he and Inno do not consummate their relationship sexually within the text. Rather than sex, the intensity of the friendship that they cultivate by speaking freely with one another deepens the meaning of their shared identification. Whereas Inno's sexuality was a concrete fact rendered unspeakable in Côte d'Ivoire, once he is in France, his identity accrues significance in discursive form, without being debased in the physical act. Inno's displacement provides the condition of possibility for an "authentic" experience of being "queer"—an experience that is oxymoronic according to the normative dichotomies that debase homosexuality and diaspora in relation to their dominant counterparts, heterosexuality and the nation. In a pattern that Meg Wesling examines across contemporary theories of queer diaspora, Inno seems to be "called upon to bear witness to the political, material, and intellectual transformations of globalization" as a proper Other to the new subjects imagined by the neoliberal world order.[80]

Abouet's supplement to Inno's narrative is integral to her strategy of employing BD as a mode of historical interpretation. Anticipating that readers will wonder how Inno obtained a visa so easily, she points out that until 1984, the law did not require Ivorians to apply for a visa before entering France.[81] Thus, Inno enjoys temporary legal status without incident once he arrives in Paris, just as Abouet did in 1983. In her words, "it was 'true love' for Ivory Coast and France, at first . . .Why the divorce?" Further into the recollection, she writes, "Things were easier in Ivory Coast back then. Ivorians didn't need to go to France or elsewhere to make a better life for themselves." This reassurance about the Ivorian Miracle underscores that while it was necessary for Inno to emigrate in order to get ahead, due to his urgent personal circumstances, his situation was the exception among trajectories into diaspora rather than the norm—he is queer. The Ivorian Bonus, which stabilizes the meaning of diasporic migration for the characters taking part in the historical events represented within the narrative, offers Inno's migration as evidence that, according to a critique of queer diaspora shared by Wesling and Jasbir Puar, native homosexuals are not cast out of their homes by retrograde sexual politics in underdeveloped nations, but rather, "the queer subject is also produced *through* transnational capitalism and the nationalist discourses that exist in tension with it."[82] In the context of Abouet's apologia, Inno's exceptional role in the narrative represents the novel example of someone who had to leave Côte d'Ivoire during the Ivorian Miracle precisely when others did not have to, because they could find fulfillment through life in Yop City.

In "strong" theories of queer diaspora, nationalism systematically constructs diaspora as the inadequate and imitative counterpart of the nation just as heteronormativity systematically misrecognizes the participants in a homoerotic relation as inauthentic copies of cisgender heterosexuals. Albert and Inno's performance as an ersatz heterosexual couple plays out in precisely the way a "strong" queer theory would predict, on the pages of the narrative, but the Ivorian Bonus declares that only aberrant individual circumstances, rather than the structuring logic of nationalism itself, would produce a subordinating relationship between diaspora and the nation. The provocative suggestion

here is that the Ivorian Miracle in *Aya* might corroborate theories of queer diaspora only in part, while frustrating the same theories' ambition to find out what narratives of diasporic migration really mean. Treatments of the turn toward this particular time and place might call for queer theories and methodologies, but novelty might be a corollary that helps sustain their efficacy in less than systematic terms.

Abouet's account of the Ivorian Miracle constructs Inno's emigration as something that was necessary for him, but largely voluntary for others. She insists that her own journey to Paris was involuntary, on a purely personal level, by situating it as part of her childhood. She does not portray her migration satisfying an economic or political need. Instead, she indicates that it appealed to her desires in ancillary ways:

> I finally got used to the idea . . . and cheered myself up with the thought that I might at least meet the man of my dreams: Rahan, the beautiful, intelligent, caveman hero of my favorite comic. I thought all men in France had long blond hair, wore little fur skirts, and carried a cutlass. As you can imagine, I was pretty disappointed when I arrived in France.[83]

Although she found the stories metropolitan France told about itself enticing, young Marguerite was not seduced by them. The disappointment resulting from her initiation into the realities of diaspora turns out to be proportional to her investment in its promises. Neither she nor her characters construe the experience of the Ivorian Miracle wholly in terms of its capacity to prove or invalidate the way diasporic subjects imagine themselves, perhaps because *Aya* is not a text that takes as its point of departure the presumption that there is any way of knowing the world in its entirety.

Abouet's journey illustrates that diasporic authorship and BD may not fulfill every wish, but they may still inspire curiosity and offer both pleasant and unpleasant surprises. The concept of novelty can show us how to learn from the limits of our imaginations even as we seek to expand them. Abouet and Oubrerie provide readers with visions of postcolonial Africa and Africans in diaspora that are neither reassuring nor revealing, because the narrative does not pretend to yield up the fates of the parties involved. One of the most instructive gestures in the text is the capacity for characters to return the readers' gaze, as if to ask what we are looking for. According to one American review: "Eyes, too, prove symbolic, for most everyone walks around sporting wide open, nigh lidless eyes, sometimes looking for all the world like figures in ancient Egyptian tomb paintings, and if somewhat unnatural, this device makes these characters seem endlessly fascinated by the world around them."[84] Given the granular detail in which Abouet and Oubrerie relate developments that are utterly immaterial on the world stage, it is no wonder the constituents of their little utopia are so attentive; it's as if they do not know what will happen next. Novelty might be an appropriate name for the fleeting moments at which we, too, look up from the grounded determinations that shape our stances toward the entire world to wonder what is happening before our eyes.

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Bio



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Every Little Thing He Does: Entrepreneurship and Appropriation in the *Magic Mike* Series

Broderick Chow

ABSTRACT This essay analyses the theatricalized performance of stripping in the popular films Magic Mike (2013; dir. Steven Soderbergh) and its sequel, Magic Mike XXL (2015; dir. Gregory Jacobs). Following a critical dance studies approach that attends to the intersection of body and gesture with socio-political, historical, and economic structures, I suggest theatricalized sexual labour in these films reveals the racial exclusions from the ideology of entrepreneurship. Considering the appropriation of black aesthetics in Magic Mike XXL's performances of striptease, the film seeks to evaporate the spectre of race, that is, the way the white fantasy of the entrepreneurial subject is supported by the appropriation of racialized and especially black labour.

The *Magic Mike* movies are all about *work*. In the first film, *Magic Mike* (2012), director Steven Soderbergh's concern is the post-industrial service economy, and the way it obliges protagonist Mike Lane (Channing Tatum) to take on many insecure jobs. It is on a roofing contract that Mike meets young Adam (Alex Pettyfer), who he quickly recruits to another job, stripping for women at a club called XQuisite. By aligning striptease with other precarious jobs Soderbergh overlaps the fantasy of unattainable masculinity with the fantasy of vocational labor, which made the film fodder for internet think-pieces—the combination of pecs, pop-and-lock and pop-Marxism was irresistible.[1]

At the same time, the *Magic Mike* movies are all about *sex*, as shown by the sequel, *Magic Mike XXL* (2015, directed by Gregory Jacobs). The same milieu of precarious work is subjected to a much more fetishistic gaze. From the cold open of Mike on a delivery, flexing his arms in the uniform of proletarian sexiness, the grey t-shirt,[2] to a new classic piece of screendance in which Mike grinds and body rolls all over his workshop, Jacob's direction shows a more ambiguous relation between striptease and other forms of labor. Manual labor is part of Mike's self-employed business and becomes the site of fantasy. Where *Magic Mike*'s dusty realist aesthetic critiques late-capitalism, *Magic Mike XXL* uses male striptease as a way of celebrating an ideology of *entrepreneurship*, which has been embraced in recent years by neoliberal ideologues (and sometimes counter-hegemonic voices), as a "a means of insertion into increasingly competitive labour markets," and a panacea to neoliberalism's collateral damages.[3] In the *Magic Mike* series, entrepreneurship becomes a "body project." Mike's body is both tool and product of labor. Autonomy, creativity, and freedom are manifested in everything from his chiselled muscles and carefully groomed hairlessness to his outstanding choreography.

Between work and sex, labor and desire, the *Magic Mike* films are a comment on a specifically *white male* experience of post-industrial precarity. But on a third level, the *Magic Mike* movies are all about *performance*, something rarely analysed in relation to them. This, perhaps, explains the mixed critical response to the sequel. While "woke bros" could watch the first film and enjoy Channing Tatum's body and dancing as Marxist

critique, the exponentially higher frequency of stripping and performance in *Magic Mike XXL* made it all too clear that audiences were consuming Tatum's sexual labor. Although male audiences seemed to stay away from the sequel (women made up 96% of audiences, apparently), I would argue this is not only a result of a kind of homophobia or homohysteria, but also a type of *anti-theatricality*.[4] For the thrusting bodies of the second film, are, above all, theatrical, gimmicky bodies, whose obvious labor of self-construction queers the economic nature of the narrative.[5] This means that we cannot understand either film as simple social commentary on precarity, and therefore any analysis based on narrative alone is incomplete. After all, it is Tatum's dancing, his ability with a theatrical form, that has been a significant part of the movies' draw. After seeing *Magic Mike XXL*, I spoke to my friend Peter, a personal trainer and bodybuilder from New Zealand, who used to be a stripper in a similar sort of club in Auckland. "It's very accurate in terms of the atmosphere and backstage and everything, but no one ever danced like Channing Tatum at my place, or anywhere else really," he told me. As a performance studies scholar with an ongoing interest in dance, it strikes me that the choreographies of *Magic Mike* and its sequel could be a way into another nagging problem with the series: its racial politics, and the exclusion of race from its discussion of precarity.

In this article, I consider the genealogy and meaning of Tatum's embodied gestures on camera to investigate the *racialized exclusions* of entrepreneurial ideology. My discussion will pivot on the concept of "magic," which functions, in the film, as an ideological device to conceal the labor of Tatum's performance by marking the character of Mike as exceptionally talented. As Tatum's dancing is based firmly in the idiom of hip hop and street dance, magic draws a veil over an appropriation of black labor.[6]

Figure 1. The solo number "Pony," from *Magic Mike*, choreographed by Alison Faulk. Set to a well-known R&B tune by Ginuwine, the number draws heavily on a pop-and-lock choreographic vocabulary. *Magic Mike*, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2012, author's screenshot.

Seen from the perspective of its embodied gestural and vocal aesthetics, *Magic Mike XXL* is a complex interesting exploration of racial politics on the level of performance rather than narrative. *XXL* is a simple road-trip bro comedy, structured as a quest. It is almost entirely free from peril or conflict: the group's aim is to perform, one final time, at a male strippers' convention. While the quest moves through historic sites of slavery in America's South, the upbeat story presents a fantasy of inclusive politics where racial antagonism doesn't exist. At the same time, in the appropriation of black aesthetics in *XXL's* striptease choreography, race returns on an unconscious but embodied level. Though the script avoids mentioning race, the physical performances gesture towards the exclusions of black, brown, and queer bodies from discussions of precarity. I will firstly explore how the (white) fantasy of the entrepreneurial subject is aligned to what Elizabeth Bernstein calls the "postindustrial paradigm of sexual commerce," before demonstrating how the film demonstrates the racialized exclusions from this mode of subjectivity in the appropriation of black aesthetics in body and voice.[7] I argue that this method, influenced by a critical dance studies approach that attends to a labor of training and performance is crucial to engage with the film's *unconscious* (or embodied) intersectional reading of the politics of precarity.[8]

"Entrepreneur-stripper? Or Stripper-entrepreneur?": Stripping, Precarity, and the Performance of Self

"Magic" Mike Lane is a self-starter, who dreams of owning a small business producing custom furniture by reclaiming and recycling used industrial refuse. When we meet him in film one, Mike is holding down multiple jobs: roofing, selling automotive accessories, events management, and stripping for women at XQuisite, a club in Tampa run by Dallas (Matthew McConaughey), who has his own entrepreneurial dreams of an "empire" of clubs. The narrative charts Mike's disillusionment with getting naked for money. Initially, as Stewart and Pine argue, Mike's stripping is imagined as "the authentic expression of active entrepreneurial self-production whose ultimate achievement is the (elusive) achievement of equity, or self-possession."[9] But the stripping lifestyle becomes an impediment to his relationship with Brooke, the female protagonist. The social realist exploration of precarity thus competes for attention with a romantic teleology that demands, Slavoj Žižek's words, the "formation of the couple."[10] Alongside Mike's disillusionment we see Adam's induction into a world of vice, culminating in a convoluted drug smuggling plot that destroys Mike's savings, and with them, his entrepreneurial dreams. Not that savings alone would secure that dream: Mike fails to secure a bank loan to start his furniture business—embodying entrepreneurial ideology alone is not enough to allow him access to credit.

Figure 2. Brooke (Cody Horn) and Mike (Channing Tatum). Note the jaundiced color palette employed by Soderbergh in all scenes external to XQuisite. *Magic Mike*, author's screenshot.

Figure 3. In contrast, the onstage scenes are saturated with color. *Magic Mike*, author's screenshot.

Soderbergh's cinematography visualizes his critique of the post-industrial economy. Exterior shots of Tampa, Mike's house, the construction site, the bank, backstage at XQuisite and other "real" locations are lensed in a washed-out, jaundiced, and dusty color. This is juxtaposed by the brilliantly saturated colors of the onstage fantasy world in which the strip show takes place. Stripping is thus presented as a seductive but ultimately unfulfilling diversion. While stripping represents Mike's flexibility and versatility as a member of a post-industrial economy, the film suggests it is not part of his "self." "I'm not my lifestyle," he shouts to Brooke, "am I Magic Mike right now talking to you? I'm not my goddamn job!" Stripping becomes a loss of self: "Rather than coming to embody the self-made man [. . .] his self vanishes, and he is transfigured as an iconic non-self. The nude, unlike the naked, the embodied subjectivity that resists objectification, is an object his clients can control and consume."[11] Despite the initial frisson of self-fulfilment, *Magic Mike* presents male stripping in a way that chimes in with first-person dance and performance scholarship on women's stripping, such as Jessica Berson's account of the way corporate management in branded clubs exercises creative control over dancers' very movements; or Louise Owen's argument that fitness based pole-dancing, presented as empowering, normalizes hyper-femininity in relation to precarity and patriarchy.[12] Read strictly on the level of story and shots, *Magic Mike* presents a fairly sobering, realist exploration of the alienation of male bodies under neoliberalism, where "stripping [can] be understood as a sexualized extension of emotional work."[13]

Sociological and ethnographic research around striptease and sex work echoes these cinematic concerns. According to Elizabeth Bernstein, "a rise in service occupations and

temporary work, an increase in labour migrations from developing to developed countries, and the emergence of new paradigms of family and community have fuelled the growth and diversification of sexual labour."[14] In this "post-industrial culture," men stripping for women becomes part of a larger portfolio of entrepreneurial work and holds the promise of controlling both women and money, reifying the compulsory heterosexual matrix while reversing positions of objectification and consumption.[15] Maren Scull notes that for her informants, "stripping led to increased feelings of mattering and mastery, and enhanced [their] self-esteem."[16] Nicola Smith goes further in her ethnographic research with male sex workers in San Francisco's Tenderloin. She writes: "many of the men I spoke to appealed to discourses surrounding the sale of sex as a form of sexual exploration, self-expression and even spiritual discovery."[17] Smith suggests that a significant number of male sex workers presented their labor as "a form of embodied critique of, resistance to, and even outright rebellion against, the perceived cultural norms of American society-at-large," often appealing to the idea of a "free market."[18] Accepting the neoliberal dictum that there is no alternative to the market, sex work is presented as an opportunity for greater self-actualization and entrepreneurship, which is precisely the attitude communicated by the characters in *Magic Mike XXL*. Interestingly, the figure of the sex-work entrepreneur correlates with what Jen Harvie calls the "Artrepreneur," which represents the way "political, economic and social mandates to foster creative economies are increasingly casting art practice as economic practice."[19] *XXL* plays on these twinned figures of precarity by emphasizing that the performance of stripping is *art*. Its vision of performance as needing to be truthful and from the self resonates with 20th century discourses of the actor's process, principally those deriving from Konstantin Stanislavsky. In a scene on the tour bus the guys discuss the set list, enthusiastic about their old hits. Mike suggests instead they come up with new routines that are truer to their inner selves, using their own desires and histories to color the performance, just as Stanislavsky's actors might draw on their emotional memory.

> Mike: (*to Richie*) Have you ever wanted to be a fireman?
>
> Richie: Nah, I got the phobia thing.
>
> Mike: That's right, fire phobia. Do you like that song? Do you play it when you're not on stage?

The "sexy version" of a uniformed job (fireman, doctor, construction worker), as Katherine Liepe-Levinson notes, has long been a part of male strip shows such as the Chippendales. *XXL*'s entrepreneurial vision discards the costume of the "hired" worker in favour of the (literally) bare self.[20] Encouraged by his buddies, Richie enters a roadside service station with the aim of making the cashier "smile." Mike eggs him on: "You're not a fireman! What are you?" Richie roars back: "I'm a male entertainer!" To the diegetic background music playing in the station, Richie proceeds to strip to the waist and dance for the cashier, pouring water from a plastic bottle on sale over himself. Eventually, she cracks a smile. Richie's performative stripping in everyday life in *XXL* folds the "alienated sexuality" of the strippers into a "true," yet entrepreneurial self.[21] Thus, the film suggests that sexual commerce requires full identification with the role, rather than carefully managed presentation (what Bernstein calls "bounded authenticity"). In the contemporary ideology of self-made entrepreneurship work becomes an opportunity for greater self-actualization, despite job security being at a historic low in the current precarious moment.[22]

Isaac Butler argues that this narrative of performance and self-fulfilment resonates with Stephen Soderbergh's own questions about art-making and cinema (while Soderbergh is not the director, he was executive producer, and shot and edited the film under different

pseudonyms).[23] In the first film, according to Butler, stripping (and by extension, filmmaking) is tempting but alienating. The second film, on the other hand, "holds out the promise that making a work of art that is authentic and made with a personal (both individual and collective) vision can be more deeply pleasurable and fulfilling for the audience."[24] Hence, stripping is taken seriously in the film as an art form. Like the genre of the "backstage musical" such as *A Chorus Line* or *42nd Street*, in which the labor of auditions and rehearsals is sublimated through the pleasure and affect of the musical number, *Magic Mike XXL* spends a lot of time watching the guys devise and work on their respective acts. In other words, *Magic Mike XXL* is a film about a form of labor that is all about satisfying the audience that wonders at the same time if this labor can be something transcendent, or, in other words, unalienated. Yet, this reading of *Magic Mike XXL*'s ideology of art and fulfilment is incomplete, as it does not consider the role of race in sustaining and reproducing fantasies of non-alienated labor (i.e. art-making). To reveal the films' racial politics, I want to turn to the key concept that forms the films' backdrop, the role of *magic*.

"The Name's Magic. Magic Mike": Magic, Theatricality, and Labor



Figure 4. (Video) The number "Pony" from Magic Mike XXL. In contrast to the first film, the reappearance of "Pony" in XXL marks the first time we see Mike dance "for himself." Note the way in which the workshop is animated by his movement and gestures. Magic Mike XXL, Youtube.com, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZqJXFGYzjtE

What exactly makes Mike "magic"? *Magic Mike XXL*'s first dance number, a version of Goethe's *Der Zauberlehrling* (*Sorcerer's Apprentice*) with more pelvic thrusting, provides a clue. The scene begins with Mike alone in his workshop late at night, welding a part for a new piece. Over the stereo, a robotic announcer tells us: "You're listening to the Golden Age of Hip Hop . . . only on Spotify," when the intro of "Pony" (familiar to viewers of the first film) by the R&B artist Ginuwine kicks in—a skittering 4/4 beat marked by a man's processed, guttural voice intoning "Yeah, yeah. Oh yeah." Mike raises his welding mask, and a wry smile crosses his face. He tries to return to work, sanding his "piece" on an angle grinder. The beat and the phallic positioning of the "work" takes over. Mike begins dancing. He starts seated in an explicitly theatrical front-facing framed shot. Using a pop-and-lock gestural vocabulary, he moves his body to the beat, his arms and legs becoming machinic or otherworldly. He swings around the support beam of the workshop like a stripper pole, landing on top of his work surface. He places his drill under his hips and thrusts them, "penetrating" the surface of the wood. He continues to grind and slide

around the equipment in the workshop, his pelvis and hips disrupting his blueprints, his plans, his tax receipts.

Channing Tatum's skill as a dancer has always made him an anachronistic Hollywood star: a physical rather than intellectual actor, in the mold of Gene Kelly.[25] Like Kelly's titular number in *Singing in the Rain*, Tatum's physicality and presence *animate* his material surroundings. The drill, furniture, and pole come alive as Tatum touches them, as if the world were open and receptive to his mastery. In both sequences, a "magical" moment is staged via the intervention of a human body that through its embodied knowledge seems to animate or create a sympathetic interaction with the material world. The sequence marks Tatum's character as especially charismatic, magnetic, and outstanding. This serves an ideological function—what does it mean for a man to be magic, a quality so long associated with women and witchcraft? Magic, I want to argue, conceals a labor relation.

Magic plays a key role in the feminist political economist Silvia Federici's analysis of primitive accumulation. Analysing the transition from feudalism to capitalism in medieval Europe, Federici argues that capitalism requires not only the appropriation of labor power, but also the appropriation of *reproductive* labor. Bourgeois capitalism necessitated "the development of a new sexual division of labor subjugating women's labor and reproductive function to the reproduction of the work-force [and] the construction of a new patriarchal order."[26] Additionally, the proletarian body was "mechanized" to a new form of capitalist work-discipline, which meant that other feminized forms of body-knowledge—such as magic—had to be destroyed.[27] Federici is not arguing that magic as such is real. However, it is "real" as a pre-capitalist, animistic concept of the world that imagined the cosmos as a living organism with which humankind held sympathetic relations.[28] "The world had to be 'disenchanted' in order to be dominated," she writes.[29] Magic threatened "the capitalist rationalization of work, since magic appeared as an illicit form of power and an instrument to *obtain what one wanted without work,* that is, a refusal of work in action," and because it "attributed special powers to the individual: the magnetic look, the power to make oneself invisible, to leave one's body, to chain the will of others by magical incantation."[30] Magic is the power to enchant and to seduce both people and things, and for Federici the purported existence of this feminine magic qua resistance to capitalist wage-discipline fueled the gendered holocaust of the witch hunts. In the female body, magic was *witchcraft*. Particularly threatening in the Middle Ages were those "magical crimes" that threatened the capitalist subjugation of women's reproductive labor, e.g. contraception and abortion, or even the ability to (according to the Bull of Innocent VIII, 1484) "hinder men from generating and women from conceiving; whence neither husbands with their wives nor wives with their husbands can perform their sexual acts."[31]

Federici's analysis demonstrates the entanglement of sex and gender with capitalist accumulation. However, while the witch hunts attempted to destroy magic qua witchcraft, I suggest it is more accurate to say that capitalism has *appropriated* the ideology of magic. Hence, in *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels write that that bourgeois society is like "the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells."[32] In other words, capitalism is the *re-enchantment* of the world. As Marx notes, the "commodity is not merely a thing, but abounds in "metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties."[33] In this sense, it is akin to a fetish, an object imbued with magical powers. In Marx's *Capital*, the following passage on an animated object complements Marx and Engels' allusion to Goethe:

> The form of wood is altered if a table is made out of it. Nevertheless the table continues to be wood, an ordinary, sensuous thing. But as soon as it emerges as

> a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, *far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will.*[34]

In *XXL*'s "Pony" we are offered a theatrical embodiment of this idea. At 1:31 of the above video Mike executes a pirouette on his workbench, landing with his knees on a stool, which happens to be perfectly placed for him. As he thrusts with his hips, the stool moves sympathetically, and impossibly, with him, almost literally animated. Getting off the stool, it appears, for a split second, to dance by itself (see also Figure 5).

Figure 5. At this point, the drill appears to be animated by Mike's thrusting pelvis. *Magic Mike XXL*, Warner Bros., 2015, author's screenshot.

The workshop setting, the props of manual labor, and the spectacular and at times *unreal* dance all contribute to Mike's magical powers, consistent with an entrepreneurial ideology in which magical characteristics such as magnetism, charisma, and even seduction are not only valued but demanded by the post-industrial, precarious economy. Channing Tatum's physical magic (which is not magic but labor and training) contribute to an ideological magic, playing into a liberal-individualistic discourse by which certain subjects are already marked for success by certain ineffable qualities. While, as Federici argues, in the Middle Ages the "existence of powers available only to particular individuals, and thus not easily generalized and exploitable" had to be eradicated, today such exceptionality is perfectly consistent with the individualist ideology of late capitalism.

However, *Magic Mike* and *Magic Mike XXL* are not conventional films about an enterprising young man. What people actually want are ripped pecs and chiselled abs—therefore, we should give greater focus to the delivery mechanism for this "bared man flesh," the films' acts of choreography and performance.[35] Tatum's dance performances demonstrate Mike's magic, but threaten to undo it, since, like in the act of a stage magician, the audience is aware that there is no magic as such except for training, rehearsal, and labor. As Nicholas Ridout argues in *Stage Fright*, the failure of the theatrical illusion is "not anomalous, but somehow, perhaps constitutive."[36] Theatre, in which people in their leisure time watch others in their working time, constructs an illusion that simultaneously draws scrutiny to the failure of this illusion. Theatre's strange failure as either commodity or directly consumed (service) labor thus draws attention to the contradictions of the illusion of commodity fetishism. Indeed, stage magic requires the potential or even partial revelation of its labored inner workings. In the same way, Mike's magic is the potential to master the world (transform it into commodities for the enrichment of the person), a completely material process, while also erasing the labor behind it. "Magic" thus is an ideological device that attempts to hide both a labor (of training and of performance) as well as the larger structures and modes of production in which this labor takes place. I suggest that, in relation to the aesthetic choices in Tatum's choreography, what the film's ideology is trying to evaporate is the spectre of *race*. By presenting Mike as "magic"—which in the films is indicated by his ability to effortlessly and naturally perform hip hop dance forms, but also to infuse a world of precarious labor with the promise that it might become "vocational"—the films divert attention away from the industrial model on which they are built, one which privileges white bodies performing black forms and styles while disavowing the labor of black performers and artists that make these forms and styles possible. This "Elvis Presley" industrial model of white appropriation of black genres is obviously nothing new, but the fundamentally theatrical

way in which the *Magic Mike* films stage appropriated magic requires critical analysis.[37] This is especially true of *Magic Mike XXL*, which threatens to undo the whole magical enterprise by providing Mike's powers with an originary myth.

"How Does It Feel?": The Appropriation of Black Aesthetics

While the first Magic Mike features a majority white cast (the mixed-race Asian-American actress Olivia Munn is the only actor of color with a featured speaking role), its sequel features three African-American performers in principal roles (Jada Pinkett-Smith, Stephen "tWitch" Boss, and Donald Glover), with substantially enlarged roles for Latino cast members Adam Rodriguez and Gabriel Iglesias from the original film. Despite greater diversity, *Magic Mike XXL* is strangely silent about race. The film pointedly situates Mike on a journey through sites of chattel slavery in Georgia and South Carolina, including two postbellum plantation mansions, but at the same time refuses to disclose what the filmmakers find attractive about this particular American geography. It therefore participates in a somewhat routine nostalgic aestheticization of the South in popular culture that sanitizes the past at the same time as it hints at the violence of slavery. However, while the narrative may remain silent on race, the performances of stripping mark certain bodies as capable of entrepreneurship through sexual magic and others as laboring on behalf of the first group.

Figure 6. The Southern Gothic interior of Domina. *Magic Mike XXL*, author's screenshot.

Magic Mike XXL's long second act is a tour-de-force of stripping set at Domina, a mansion in Savannah, Georgia that resembles a former plantation. Run by Mike's former mentor and lover Rome (played by Jada Pinkett-Smith), Domina is a private club where black men strip for black women. Mike has brought his crew here to beg the help of Rome, who they want to act as MC in place of Dallas. This rather trivial dramatic action is an excuse to show more "bared man flesh," but its unconscious purpose is to demonstrate the indebtedness of Mike's magic to his mentor Rome. The sequence is an ambiguous piece of filmmaking, which both celebrates black female desire and intimacy, and objectifies black male virtuosity. On the one hand, the sequence is unusual in mainstream cinema in that it portrays black female desire, intimacy, and enjoyment without trauma or pain. Black intimacy, Candice M. Jenkins explains, has long been a political battlefield through respectability politics, or what she calls the "salvific wish," according to which "black women (and, to a much lesser extent, black men) could pay with their bodies, or rather with the concealment and restraint of those bodies, for the ultimate 'safety' of the black community as a whole."[38] The regulation and suppression of black intimacy and erotic behaviour is political because "black bodies have been assumed always to be excessively proximate and desirous bodies, bodies too readily revealed or exposed, too willing to reveal and expose others," rendering them especially vulnerable.[39] The sequence at Domina is therefore radical in its celebration of desirous bodies without shame.

Without invalidating this celebration of black female desire, the sequence also represents a theatrical transaction in which black male bodies labor for their audience. This labor is virtuosic, but it is labor nonetheless. Firstly, Malik, played by dancer Stephen "tWitch" Boss, has an extended sequence that shows off the street dance skills for which he has become famous. Malik's strip is even more acrobatic than Mike's, his pop-and-lock gestures and body rolls intended to demonstrate his mastery of each muscle. Secondly, André, played by actor/musician Donald Glover, improvises a rap/R&B song to a woman in the audience named Caroline. André's linguistic dexterity parallel's Malik's physicality;

both are performances of black virtuosity located in typically black genres. The casting of tWitch and Glover is therefore important; both are actors, but both are also famous for their ability in genres of black performance labor. This provides a non-diegetic, intertextual key to how to watch these acts. We are watching the virtuosity of bodies rather than the performance of character. After all, tWitch doesn't even speak any lines in the film. The theatrical presentation of black virtuosity here resonates with a larger discourse and history of black masculinities and embodiment because the performances are not only directed to a black female gaze, but a white male one as well. Malik's performance takes place in a semicircle of black women, who mainly stand watching his back. As the camera pulls back we see that at the opening of the semicircle Mike is watching with Rome. Malik is performing as much for Mike's gaze as the women's, and ours. Similarly, André's performance is directed to "Caroline," who never appears again in the film. The actual purpose of this performance is to create a connection between André and Ken, who are seen in the very next scene talking about how to make a start in the music business.

Figure 7. Malik's strip, performed by Stephen "tWitch" Boss. *Magic Mike XXL*, author's screenshot.

Figure 8. Malik's performance is staged for Mike's gaze as much as our own. Here we see Rome, Mike, and the rest of the crew form a diegetic audience. Magic *Mike XXL*, author screenshots.

In his book *Constructing the Black Masculine*, literary theorist Maurice O. Wallace theorizes the concept of black male *spectragraphia*, a "chronic syndrome of inscripted misrepresentation."[40] Wallace argues that the framing of the black male body as public spectacle "congeals black male bodies into statued rigidities, arresting representation at the threshold of human being."[41] *Spectragraphia* confines black masculinities within existing representational regimes. It makes black male bodies, in Mark Anthony Neal's words, "legible." As Neal writes, "that the most 'legible' black male body is often thought to be a criminal body and/or a body in need of policing and containment—incarceration—is just a reminder that the black male body that so seduces America is just as often the bogeyman that keeps America awake at night."[42] Presenting black male sex work within immediately legible cultural forms—the street dancer, and the "Soul Man"—*Magic Mike XXL* does little to challenge the *spectragraphia* of the black male body.

The presence of Mike's crew in this enchanted scene of black labor congeals the relation between (appropriated) labor, performance, and enjoyment that has its origins in America's history of slavery. "Black men," Antonia Randolph writes, "because of their race, never had the luxury of not having their bodies examined."[43] At the same time as black men have been "over identified with their bodies," Randolph suggests—in sympathy with Jenkins' position—that they have also been "denied the pleasures of it."[44] However, as Saidiya Hartman demonstrates, the black performance of excess enjoyment was also an instrument of white domination and power. Analysing historical accounts of the "coerced theatricality"[45] of the coffle (the enchained line of slaves marching together), the displays of the auction block, and the stage performances of melodrama and minstrelsy, Hartman argues that the accounts of slaves "singing and dancing" speak to a perception of blacks as "carefree, infantile, hedonistic, and indifferent to suffering,"[46] disavowing the violence

of chattel slavery, even within accounts of slavery as a repulsive practice by white abolitionists.[47] She writes:

> Moreover, blacks were envisioned fundamentally as vehicles for white enjoyment, in all of its sundry and unspeakable expressions; this was as much the consequence of the chattel status of the captive as it was of the excess enjoyment imputed to the other, for those forced to dance on the decks of slave ships crossing the Middle Passage, step it up lively on the auction block, and amuse the master and his friends were seen as the purveyors of pleasure.[48]

Hartman's theorization of the way black performance is bound up with black pain and the historical trauma of slavery provides more distressing context to how we might view the performance of sex work by black male bodies who seem, to all appearances, to be tied to a house (Domina) and a mistress (Rome). Malik's performance (like Mike's, for example) is excessively physical and acrobatic, at least for a striptease. The *passion* he puts into his work obscures the structures in which this work takes place, and the way this passion and labor might be coerced. The virtuosity and apparent honesty of André's serenading of Caroline, which appears in the "soul man" tradition that is based on the intertwining of love and pain, is similarly obfuscating. Of course, black performance in the context of this film is in no way equivalent to performance in the context of chattel slavery, yet it demonstrates the same disavowal of labor.[49] The fact that this work is a form of sex work only reinforces the *specular* discourse by which black men and women are imagined as more wanton or sexual than whites.

Such perceptions do not exist for the white members of Mike's crew, who can appropriate this labor in the way that the apprentice might finally learn the sorcerer's magic. After the performances of Malik and André, Rome continues to refuse Mike her aid, forcing him to prove his "training" in another acrobatic strip sequence. Faulk's choreography here is expansive, taking advantage of the large space of the mansion. As in the workshop, Tatum's body moves through each corner, using his surrounding environment as a kind of playground. Only here, rather than tools, props, and materials, Mike's objects are black bodies. The sequence begins as Mike leapfrogs over Malik's back into the space. Sharing a glance with Rome and kissing her hand, he slides back into the center of the room, thrusting his pelvis into the face of a slim black woman who appears to be positioned, waiting, on all fours for him. This woman is then flipped up, over, and around as Mike simulates cunnilingus and penetrative sex, the camera rarely giving us a view of her face, but rather concentrating on Mike's face and torso. Towards the end of the dance, Mike uses the backs of two women as tables. Effectively, the magic of the workshop has been reversed, or perhaps extended: while in the workshop Mike's magic enchants objects here the bodies of black women become props for Mike's performance, like the tables he creates in his workshop. His magic now fully expresses the ideology of bourgeois capitalism: from the manipulation of the natural world to the objectification of others.

Figure 9. The "table top" sequence is repeated with the bodies of black women standing in for the objects in Mike's workshop. *Magic Mike XXL*, author's screenshot.

"White Chocolate" and Blue-Eyed Soul

In the final third of the movie, the guys arrive at Myrtle Beach for the convention and are coached by Rome, Andre, and Malik for their final show, in which the appropriation of blackness is strongly apparent. Firstly, we have Tito's strip, which takes as its setting an ice-cream parlour, referencing his earlier post-stripping goal. Played by Puerto

Rican/Cuban-American actor Adam Rodriguez, Tito takes to the stage with hair braided in fresh cornrows, to the song "Candy Shop" by rapper 50 Cent. Rodriguez, who is clearly not a trained dancer, has his first "solo" dance of the two films. While featuring the simulated sexual intercourse and masturbation of a Chippendales number, the number also includes athletic movements based in hip hop and street dance.

More interesting is the transformation of "Ken-Doll." In a previous scene, Matt Bomer had already demonstrated his skill as a singer by serenading another woman with Bryan Adams' 1984 ballad, "Heaven." But this is white-boy music. In order for his strip to be a full performance of self-expression, he needs to find a new sound, with the help of Rome and André. Bomer begins the number in black vest, suspenders, and trousers. He flips up a bowler hat onto his head before thrusting his hips forward. He isolates his head up, to the side, and down, then glides to the side, with leg extended and fingers on the brim of his hat. The costuming and choreographic style references Bob Fosse but the music is the sparse snare drum and electric bass intro to R&B artist D'Angelo's "(Untitled) How Does It Feel?," the stand-out track of D'Angelo's album *Voodoo* (2000). Recalling the pleading falsetto of Marvin Gaye, the song propelled D'Angelo into the canon of neo-soul, but is perhaps better known for its music video, which consisted of a single shot, zooming in and out, of D'Angelo's muscular naked body. On the one hand, as Keith M. Harris writes, the video was (like *XXL*'s Domina sequence) an opportunity for the reversal of Laura Mulvey's "male gaze," "offer[ing] an opportunity for disruption in that in a filmic convention D'Angelo is feminized, objectified, and rendered wholly as spectacle." [50] On the other hand, the objectification of the black male body is not liberating. Indeed, D'Angelo publicly admitted to feeling objectified by the video and took a nearly 14-year hiatus. Matt Bomer's "blue-eyed soul" cover of "How Does It Feel?" hints at this objectification (the number is designed to showcase Bomer's sculpted white body, after all) but also feels strangely non-sexual, as its aesthetics highlight the white performer's facility and virtuosity with black genre. It is therefore all about entrepreneurial ideology: Ken is magic too.

Figure 10. This explicitly theatrical shot references the choreography of Bob Fosse, while the aesthetic of the singing is based in the soul tradition. *Magic Mike XXL*, author's screenshot.

Finally, Channing Tatum's street dance skills are reframed in his final number with tWitch. Set within the frame of what is meant to be a giant mirror, Mike and Malik appear as "twins," dressed in identical outfits: flat brimmed baseball caps, button-down shirts buttoned only at the top, baggy jeans, and bandannas (initially) covering their faces. The costume references the style of rappers in the 1990s, and is clearly a pastiche of gangsta rap style, appropriated here to communicate "danger" or "threat." What follows is an extended number, set to three pieces of rap/R&B, which, more than any other in the two films, demonstrates Tatum's virtuosity with street dance. With the camera's gaze following only Tatum, tWitch is positioned as the "authentic" core of the movement, with the audience intended to marvel at Tatum's ability to mime this performance of blackness.

Figure 11. Mike and Malik's costumes for the final number. *Magic Mike XXL*, author's screenshots.

What is at stake in these performances is not just the idea of appropriation, of ownership of cultural forms, but material questions of remuneration and credit for work performed.

Against a backdrop of industrial change in which "everyone" is meant to be a cultural producer of sorts, *XXL*'s embodied staging of the appropriation of black performance labor resonates with current and exceedingly material debates around appropriation in online social media, where black cultural production on platforms like Twitter and YouTube often drives wider culture but remains uncredited and unremunerated. (Doreen St. Felix gives the example of the phrase "on fleek," which originated on sixteen-year old Kayla Newman's Vine channel.)[51] Writing on the phenomenon of "blue-eyed soul," Neal remarks: "the practice of racial covers is also implicated in the political economy of American masculinity. Someone isn't just getting *paid*—they are often remade, though with the kind of flexibility that allows them to travel from 'here' to 'there' with an ease that the black bodies they appropriate are often unable to."[52] In *XXL*, it is the white/multi-racial crew who are free to go on their entrepreneurial quest of stripping-for-its-own-sake, while the black dancers and performers are confined to the walls of Domina. By miming blackness, the performances in the third act of the film both obscure and reveal the fact that black virtuosity is a kind of choreography. The embodied adoption of black aesthetics by the mainly white strippers unconsciously returns to the fact of which bodies are excluded from the primarily white fantasy of entrepreneurial self-making. To fulfill the fantasy of self-made entrepreneurship, Mike and the crew must rely on the unacknowledged labor of the film's black characters: Rome, Andre, and Malik. In other words, despite the powerful performances of Smith, Glover, and tWitch, the quest narrative of *XXL* places the film's black characters in structural position of what director Spike Lee called the "Magical Negro" trope.[53] While the film cannot acknowledge this racial discord directly it returns, unconsciously, in the bodies and voices of the actors.

Conclusion: Whither Magic?

Despite the conflict-free fantasy of its narrative, the film does not really have a happy ending—the final shots of the film are surprisingly bittersweet. Although their performance at the stripper's convention is a triumph, there is no prize to be won, no boon to be seized at the end of their quest. We never even see them pick up the piles of dollar bills from the floor. The crew goes out to the boardwalk to watch the 4th of July fireworks. Zoe, who has been set up as potential love interest for Mike, simply runs off with her female friends, denying the audience the satisfaction of the "formation of the couple." Shot in Soderbergh's handheld realist mode, the film ends on a shot of Tatum's face, both satisfied with a job well done, and wondering where the next job will come from, and more importantly, what that job will be. Magic is no defense against the forces of capitalism once released, mainly because it doesn't actually exist. There is no magic, just labor.

Figure 12. The film's surprisingly wistful and even melancholy ending. *Magic Mike XXL*, author's screenshot.

The gendered status of this labor intersects with the unconscious questions of race the series poses. As I have argued, magic is a mercurial ideology that is ultimately familiar—it signals capability, mastery, the ability to get the job done, all facets of the white male bourgeois subject of classical liberalism. Ultimately, though, the films express an anxiety over the fate of this subject, since, in the context of neoliberal precarity, its white male characters must assume a traditionally female-gendered and racialized position of affective labor. The performance of sex work by the characters in *Magic Mike* thus threatens a form of white American masculinity that is based in individual self-determination.[54] Black aesthetics, in body and voice, therefore, become a means of safely occupying and therefore disavowing this feminine position. Marx, in 1844, was troubled by the principle shared between wage labor and prostitution: "You must make everything

that is yours saleable, i.e. useful."[55] In the *Magic Mike* films making yourself saleable is part of the fantasy, a way of surviving and having fun in the post-industrial economy. But considering the political unconscious of *Magic Mike XXL* reveals that this fantasy is not equally available to all bodies. While Mike Lane can both self-objectify and maintain his sense of individuality, participation in this ideology of entrepreneurship is off limits to those subjects whose racialization has historically marked them as already-objectified.

Postscript

At the time of writing, Channing Tatum has announced that he will be directing *Magic Mike Live Las Vegas*, a "classy" male stripper show, at the Hard Rock Hotel in Las Vegas from March 2017.[56] One assumes Soderbergh's reflections on male vulnerability in post-crisis America will not feature. According to the press release, the production may even hop onto the immersive theatre trend: "The experience starts as you enter Club Domina, a real-life version of the club at the foundation of Magic Mike XXL, where men cater to women's desires."[57] No mention of race is made in relation to Domina's performers or clientele. The release concludes:

> Expressly created to capture the *magnetism* of a film franchise that has grossed nearly $300 million, this new venue and its immersive production will be one of the most unique entertainment experiences in Las Vegas. [. . .] Like Mike, *these guys are about much more than a strip*. Of course there will be dancing, but MAGIC MIKE LIVE LAS VEGAS is about giving women an immersive, first-class entertainment experience.[58]

On the one hand, the reference to the fact that "these guys are about much more than a strip" seems to be a disavowal of the sexual nature of male striptease for a female audience that is a recurring trope in advertisements for such acts as the Chippendales.[59] On the other hand, it plays curiously into the discourse of magic I have unpacked in this article. Indeed, perhaps the theatre is the ideal place to stage a critique of magic. While the illusion of a Channing Tatum-look-alike grinding athletically to "Pony" will no doubt be strong, that "Mike's" magic is comprised of, among other things, shabby sets, sequined g-strings, thick makeup, sweat, labored breathing, and work will perhaps be concurrently exposed.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. See, for instance, Elizabeth Greenwood, "Dancing Days," *The New Inquiry*, July 9, 2012, http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/dancing-days/; Matthew McCracken, "Conceivably Leftist Cinema, *Magic Mike*" (Parts 1 and 2), *Cinepunx*, n.d., accessed

August 5, 2016, http://www.cinepunx.com/Writing/conceivably-leftist-cinema-magic-mike-part-1-of-2/; Manohlo Dargis, "The Body Politic," New York Times, June 28, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/29/movies/magic-mike-by-steven-soderbergh-with-channing-tatum.html, and a piece by blogger "The Fine Art Diner," "*Magic Mike* and the Three Faces of Capitalism," June 30, 2012, http://thefineartdiner.blogspot.co.uk/2012/06/magic-mike-three-faces-of-capitalism.html. A representative example is an article by Joshua Clover, entitled "Dance Dance Revolution: *Magic Mike*, *Step Up Revolution*, and the Occupy movement," where he writes: "*Magic Mike* is a film, at its core, about a sex worker during the prolonged financial crisis, starring an actor who has also been that manner of sex worker in real life. {Mike is} a representative of immaterial and affective labour {. . .} ironically both victim and cause, locked in a sort of dance of death with the declining profitability of capital." Joshua Clover, "Dance Dance Revolution: *Magic Mike, Step Up Revolution,* and the Occupy Movement," *Moving Image Source*, February 4, 2013, http://www.movingimagesource.us/articles/dance-dance-revolution-20130204.

2. See Roxane Gay's scene-by-scene commentary: "I Wanted to Hug Every Part of Him With My Mouth: A Magic Mike XXL Recap," *The Toast,* July 1, 2015, http://the-toast.net/2015/07/01/magic-mike-xxl-recap/
3. Alessandra de Sá Mello da Costa and Luiz Alex Silva Saraiva, "Hegemonic Discourses on Entrepreneurship as an Ideological Mechanism for the Reproduction of Capitalism," *Organization* 19, no. 5 (2012): 587.
4. Nigel M. Smith, "Magic Mike is an XXL Hit with Women but Why Did it Turn Men Off?" *The Guardian*, July 6, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/jul/06/magic-mike-xxl-attracts-women-scares-men-box-office.
5. A fuller discussion of the theatrical and gimmicky body can be found in Broderick Chow, "Muscle Memory: Re-enacting the *Fin-de-Siècle* Strongman in Pro Wrestling," in *Performance and Professional Wrestling*, ed. Broderick Chow, Eero Laine, and Claire Warden (London: Routledge, 2016), 143–153.
6. Choreographer Alison Faulk has been a dancer for numerous hip hop and R&B artists and is a member of an all-female hip hop crew. See "Alison Faulk," *Danceplug,* n.d., accessed August 5, 2016, https://www.danceplug.com/alison-faulk. While Channing Tatum reportedly has no formal dance training, he rose to fame as the star of the street dance series *Step Up*.
7. Elizabeth Bernstein, *Temporarily Yours: Intimacy, Authenticity, and the Commerce of Sex* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007).
8. "Critical Dance Studies" denotes a large and diverse field of scholarship. In using the term here I am drawing on Melissa Blanco Borelli's conceptualisation, in her *Oxford Handbook of Dance and the Popular Screen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), of critical dance studies as *method*, that understands the wider significance of screendance through specific mediated bodies and choreographies. In this essay I am particularly interested in two of the questions Borelli poses: "How are multiple choreographies of identity (e.g., race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation) set in motion through the narrative, dancing bodies and/or dance style?" and "What type of corporeal labours . . . are represented or ignored?" (1).
9. Michelle Stewart and Jason Pine, "Vocational Embodiments of the Precariat in *The Girlfriend Experience* and *Magic Mike*," *Topia 30–31* (2013), 186.
10. Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out* (London: Routledge, 1992).
11. Stewart and Pine, "Vocational Embodiments," 199.
12. Jessica Berson, *The Naked Result: How Exotic Dance Became Big Business* (Oxford

and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Louise Owen, "Work That Body: Precarity and Femininity in the New Economy," *TDR: The Drama Review*, 56, no. 4 (2012), 78–94.

13. David M. Boden, "Alienation of Sexuality in Male Erotic Dancing," *Journal of Homosexuality* 53, nos. 1–2 (2007): 131.
14. Bernstein, *Temporarily Yours*, 4.
15. This view is expressed by Mike's protégé, "The Kid', as he begins to go off the rails.
16. Maren T. Scull, "The Self-Concept as Side Bet: How Stripping Enhances the Self-Views of Men Who Dance for Women," *Deviant Behaviour* 36 (2014): 895.
17. Nicola J. Smith, "Body Issues: The Political Economy of Male Sex Work," *Sexualities* 15, nos. 5/6 (2012): 594.
18. Ibid., 596 and 597.
19. Jen Harvie, *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (London: Palgrave), 62.
20. Katherine Liepe-Levinson, *Strip Show: Performances of Gender and Desire* (London: Routledge, 2001).
21. Boden, "Alienation."
22. Miya Tokumitsu, "In the Name of Love," *Jacobin*, January 2014, https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/01/in-the-name-of-love/. The different role cash money plays in the sequel is indicative of this disavowal of the exchange value of the striptease. Cash, Liepe-Levinson points out, regulates the rituals of stripping, both male and female. Whereas the first film shows men coming backstage with g-strings stuffed with dollar bills, here cash is a fantastical visual trope, raining down on the men, the greenbacks under blue-light suggesting geysers of ejaculate. No one ever picks up the money. See Katherine Liepe-Levinson, *Strip Show,* 171.
23. Isaac Butler, "On Magic Mike XXL: Entertainment, Art, Fulfillment, and Big Dicks," *Parabasis*, October 12, 2015, http://parabasis.typepad.com/blog/2015/10/on-magic-mike-xxl-entertainment-art-fulfillment-and-big-dicks.html.
24. Ibid.
25. Joel and Ethan Coen play up this comparison in their Golden Age of Hollywood pastiche, *Hail Caesar!*
26. Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation*, rev. ed. (New York: Autonomedia, 2014), 12.
27. Ibid., 12 and 142.
28. Ibid., 142.
29. Ibid., 172.
30. Ibid.
31. Quoted in Ibid., 180.
32. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), Marxists.org, accessed August 11, 2016, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm.
33. Karl Marx, *Capital* (1867; repr. London: Penguin Books, 1990), 165.
34. Ibid. Emphasis added. I am grateful to Dr. Matthew P. M. Kerr for this example.
35. Gay, "I Wanted to Hug."
36. Nicholas Ridout, *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4.
37. As Helen Kolawole writes, "the case of Elvis is particularly infuriating because for many black people he represents the most successful white appropriation of a black genre to date {. . .} The enduring image of Elvis is a constant reflection of society's then refusal to accept anything other than the non-threatening and subservient negro: Sammy Davies Jnr and Nat King Cole. The Elvis myth to this day clouds the true picture of rock'n'roll and leaves its many originators without due recognition."

Helen Kolawole, "He Wasn't My King," *The Guardian*, August 15, 2002, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2002/aug/15/elvis25yearson.elvispresley.

38. Candice M. Jenkins, *Private Lives, Proper Relations: Regulating Black Intimacy* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 14.
39. Ibid., 19–20.
40. Maurice O. Wallace, *Constructing the Black Masculine: Identity and Ideality in African American Men's Literature and Culture, 1775–1995* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 30–31.
41. Ibid., 6.
42. Mark Anthony Neal, *Looking for Leroy: Illegible Black Masculinities* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), 4.
43. Antonia Randolph, "'Don't Hate Me Because I'm Beautiful': Black Masculinity and Alternative Embodiment in Rap Music," *Race, Gender, and Class* 13, nos. 3–4 (2006): 202.
44. Ibid.
45. Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 37.
46. Ibid., 22.
47. Ibid., 32–36.
48. Ibid., 22–23.
49. Ariel Osterweis's work on dancer Desmond Richardson points out the distinct double-bind that black dancers face with regard to technical virtuosity: "the curious relationship between disciplined perceptions of virtuosity's excess and the disciplining of the racialized body is such that audiences are often taught to be weary of abundant movement while simultaneously expecting it of black dancers." In calling Richardson's virtuosity "choreographic falsetto," she points to the fact that such naturalization of labour can be applied to singers too. Ariel Osterweis, "The Muse of Virtuosity: Desmond Richardson, Race, and Choreographic Falsetto," *Dance Research Journal* 45, no. 3 (2013), 53–74.
50. Keith M. Harris, "'Untitled': D'Angelo and the Visualization of the Black Male Body," *Wide Angle* 21, no. 4 (1999), 62–83.
51. Doreen St. Felix, "Black Teens Are Breaking the Internet and Seeing None of the Profits," *Fader*, Dec/Jan 2017, http://www.thefader.com/2015/12/03/on-fleek-peaches-monroee-meechie-viral-vines.
52. Mark Anthony Neal, "White Chocolate Soul: Teena Marie and Lewis Taylor," *Popular Music* 24, no. 3 (2005): 370.
53. See Cerise L. Glenn and Landra J. Cunningham, "The Power of Black Magic: The Magical Negro and White Salvation in Film," *Journal of Black Studies* 40, no. 2 (2009), 135-152.
54. David Savran, *Taking It Like A Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).
55. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844,* Marxists.org, accessed December 9, 2015, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/needs.htm.
56. Carly Mallenbaum, "'Magic Mike Live': Channing Tatum's Strip Show's Heading to Vegas in 2017," *USA Today* (Online), May 5, 2016, http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/entertainthis/2016/05/04/channing-tatum-magic-mike-live/83948368/.
57. Ibid.
58. Magic Mike Live Las Vegas, "Channing Tatum Brings Magic Mike To The Stage In Sin City," PR Newswire, May 4, 2016, http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/channing-tatum-brings-magic-mike-to-the-stage-in-sin-city-

300263285.html. Emphasis added.

59. See Liepe-Levinson, *Strip Show*.

Bio



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Target Markets and Logistical Management

Lindsay Weinberg

ABSTRACT This paper demonstrates how target marketing provides valuable point-of-sale and point-of-interaction insights, and argues that the labor theory of value is untenable for understanding the conditions of leisure-time surveillance and data aggregation. It then provides a close reading of an Amazon affiliated fulfillment center exposé in order to examine precisely how the information produced during leisure-time surveillance intensifies the exploitation of fulfillment center labor. Target marketing is part of a larger apparatus that aggregates data for the purposes of assigning risk, differentiating prices, and managing supply chains and labor costs.

Introduction

Cultural studies scholarship has been at the forefront of analyzing the transformations in culture and political economy underpinning the transition to post-Fordist information societies. In particular, cultural studies has explored the tension in digital culture between forms of online user empowerment such as social media and online community building, which figure the user as both producer and consumer, with the ways the exploitation of user data and digital labor perpetuate inequality. This article works to bring cultural studies scholarship into conversation with the critical study of logistics and supply chain management, with a focus on illustrating how precisely target advertising and the surveillance of user behavior contribute to the capitalist project of risk management and labor exploitation.

Critical studies on logistics and supply chain management often focus on the transformations in the organization of labor that result from an emphasis on the circulation of commodities. Anna Tsing defines supply chain capitalism as

> commodity chains based on subcontracting, outsourcing, and allied arrangements in which the autonomy of component enterprises is legally established even as the enterprises are disciplined within the chain as a whole. Such supply chains link ostensibly independent entrepreneurs, making it possible for commodity processes to span the globe. Labor, nature, and capital are mobilized in fragmented but linked economic niches.[1]

For Tsing, supply chain management through the logistical coordination of labor, transport, and consumer demand has allowed capitalism to efficiently exploit the "enhanced mobility of labor and the economic and political vulnerabilities created by recent forms of imperialism and histories of global war."[2] Similarly, Deborah Cowen is concerned with what she describes as the "new framework of security—supply chain security" that capital's emphasis on circulation necessitates: a framework which "relies on a range of new forms of transnational regulation, border management, data collection, surveillance, and labor discipline, as well as naval missions and aerial bombing."[3] Target marketing—the segmentation of consumers according to their demographic data, buying habits, preferences, and/or location for the purposes of advertising—and practices of

leisure-time surveillance are not generally framed as part of the shift in capital's emphasis on circulation. However, if part of logistical management is about the displacement of labor to the underdeveloped world, it is equally about monitoring circulation and demand in the overdeveloped.

This paper argues that situating target marketing as a technology of logistical management emphasizes the importance of information in not only intensifying and maximizing the productivity of supply chains and reducing labor costs, but also increasing the likelihood of a return on capitalist investment through the management of market choices. The paper begins by analyzing how target marketing operates as a technology of risk management via consumer surveillance. I then frame target marketing as part of the historical trajectory of the revolution in control described by James R. Beniger. I demonstrate how target marketing provides valuable point-of-sale and point-of-interaction insights, and platform providers can wield this information not only to control prices and allocate advertisements, but also to manage distribution and arbitrage the labor market. Rather than conceptualizing the production of user data as a form of labor in the context of target marketing, I argue that the labor theory of value is being misapplied to the conditions of leisure-time surveillance and data aggregation essential to target marketing. The explanation of user attentiveness as a site of labor not only disregards the relationship between value and time, but also tends to collapse distinctions between the workday and leisure-time surveillance in ways that mystify the differences in how capitalism exercises control over subjects. I then provide a close reading of a fulfillment center exposé in order to examine precisely how the information produced during leisure-time surveillance can impact the conditions of fulfillment center labor. Target marketing, then, is part of a larger logistical apparatus that aggregates data for the purposes of assigning risk, differentiating prices, and managing supply chains and labor costs. It equally reinforces biases and discriminatory practices prevalent in financial institutions in order to maximize profit through the aggregation of data produced by users during seemingly innocuous acts of consumption and online attentiveness.

Risk and Differential Pricing

Target marketing is not simply a means of presenting users with the "best" options and choices on the market or the most relevant information to their preferences and desires. Target marketing works by tracking consumer behavior, preferences, likes, cursor hovers, purchasing habits, location, and any other useful information directly provided during user registration, captured by cookies, and/or purchased from third-party data collection services in order to determine the presentation of advertisements and, depending on the company, manage supply chains. For instance, Amazon uses the data it collects not only to make recommendations to users, but also to advise sellers on how much stock to carry, how to price goods, what goods to keep producing, and how to best market themselves.[4] Amazon tracks customers and aggregates the data from all its users to see who is buying what and when. This collection of information from all the users of its site is what informs the algorithm and allows Amazon to make recommendations based on what others have purchased.[5] By drawing upon the entire pool of data from all of their customers, Amazon is able to make recommendations to new customers who have yet to demarcate their preferences.

In addition to helping intensify the circulation of goods and manage stock, pricing, and other production-side concerns, target marketing serves as a technology of classifying users according to the likelihood they will provide a return on capitalist investment. Target marketing thus reinforces biases and discriminatory practices prevalent in financial institutions in order to maximize profit through the aggregation of data produced by users during seemingly innocuous acts of consumption and online attentiveness. Service

providers use what Bill Davidow describes as "personal redlining" to limit choices and differentially price goods.[6] Subjects who are perceived as more likely to consume are presented with better options, incentives, and prices, while others who are perceived as risks or whose browsing behavior, demographic data, and patterns of consumption do not appear as viable opportunities for creating profit are presented with different information.

The supposed value of target marketing is that it can disaggregate demand in order to determine the price a consumer is most willing to pay. User data provides a new site of information that can be mined for the purposes of forecasting demand, assigning risk, and determining prices. Differential pricing, meaning the process whereby consumers are sold the same goods for different prices, allows for the maximization of profit. For economists like Hal Varian, differential pricing is egalitarian:

> Forcing a producer to sell to everyone at the same price may *sound* like a good idea. But it can easily end up encouraging the producer to sell only to the high end of the market. Differential pricing gives the producer an incentive to supply the product to everyone who is willing to pay the incremental cost of production . . . Forcing a policy of flat pricing in an industry where it is inappropriate due to the nature of technology may well have perverse consequences.[7]

Varian's argument is that differential pricing allows the majority consumers to enjoy the same goods by correlating the price of a product to the consumer's means. This model of differential pricing is dependent upon the collection of data about consumers in order to determine the highest price each consumer would be willing to pay. Hal Varian's egalitarianism neglects to mention the common practice of redlining in industries such as insurance, health care, and banking, where subjects are denied access to services because they are perceived as financial risks.[8] Rather than overt discrimination, "companies can smuggle proxies for race, sex, indebtedness, and so on into big-data sets and then draw correlations and conclusions that have discriminatory effects" using third-party data sources concerning buying history to predict health status, for instance, that then affects insurance rates.[9] In this sense, differential pricing can be situated within a wider set of practices that use information about consumers to manage the options and choices they are presented with, particularly to incentivize those most likely to provide a return on capitalist investment, and to manage the kinds of services and options (or lack thereof) offered to those deemed too risky.

Despite the constant refrain that algorithmic models are neutral and objective, they are, as Frank Pasquale argues, "predictably biased toward reinforcing certain hierarchies of wealth and attention."[10] The outcomes of algorithmic sorting of information and market choices function as a microcosm of larger structural inequalities. But by anonymizing and aggregating data to formulate predictive models of user behavior, software platforms are able to argue that they uphold the legal protections afforded to users in regard to individual privacy. Subjects are anonymized and fragmented according to their informational byproducts within communication networks, and this makes possible the regulation of choice and potential increase in profit in ways that are not illegally discriminatory. However, the ability to differentially price goods and determine which users are most likely to provide a return on capitalist investment necessarily entails the restriction of choice and opportunity. Additionally, algorithms are predicated on deriving profit from an aggregate of consumers who are anonymized to the extent that identifying information is reconstituted into abstract data. Companies are able to claim as their private property the detailed information about their consumer base and then use it for

managing the circulation of capital.

Target Marketing As Control Technology

It would be worthwhile to briefly historicize target marketing as a technique of control emerging out of the need to manage markets. Beginning with nineteenth-century industrial production, it was necessary to develop bureaucratic control over information to make production and market expansion more efficient. Max Weber famously detailed this phenomenon when he described the emergence of highly rationalized bureaucracies in reaction to the growth of industrial societies and the need for control over information in order to administer them.[11] After World War II, control began to shift from conventional models of bureaucratic organization—highly rationalized organizations governed by supervision and impersonal rules for workplace conduct and information management—to computer technology.[12] Beniger situates the rise of the computer and information processing technologies as tools to manage crises in the production and distribution of goods as the market's scope of distribution spread. For Beniger, the development of mass communications technologies was essential for stimulating and reinforcing demand for mass-produced goods.

Twentieth-century mass feedback technologies, including questionnaires, house-to-house interviewing, opinion surveys, and other technologies for monitoring consumer behavior, were a further manifestation of bureaucratic rationality—a form of administration and control based on logical and statistical approaches to human behavior. The prevailing attitude concerning consumer behavior also shifted in the twentieth century from the assumption that consumers act based on reason (the self-interested rational utility-maximizer initially proposed by Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham) whose actions could therefore be easily predicted, to the idea that consumers acted based on uncertainty.[13] This necessitated, according to Beniger,

> continuous monitoring to detect habituation to messages and other changes in preferences and habit. Just such monitoring of mass populations had begun to develop by the turn of the century in what would become the most widely used of all market feedback technologies: survey research.[14]

With target marketing, meaning the use of mass online surveillance to deliver content, goods, services, and advertisements to target markets, companies no longer need to invest in consumer polling and survey research because the consumer produces data about her preferences when she consumes, either directly through purchases or through her clicks, likes, cursor hovers, and browsing behavior.[15]

Whereas prior to consumer-centered information technologies, manufacturers and suppliers had the best information about demand, sales, and competition, the automatic collection of consumer data shifted power to the retailers that control these information flows, allowing them to demand greater flexibility from manufacturers and control labor costs.[16] By the 1990s, the expression "data mining" became popularized in mainstream culture, and by 2005 companies would begin competing using extensive analytics and algorithms to mine data and produce valuable information for managing warehouses, transportation infrastructure, and industrial rhythms.[17]

Under conditions of post-Fordism, information aggregation provides greater flexibility and specialization. Capitalism shifts its focus in the overdeveloped world from production to circulation, meaning the ability to manage the speed and efficiency of the distribution of commodities, and with target marketing, we can add the allocation of advertisements and market choices. According to Jasper Bernes, the circulationist production philosophy "aims to submit all production to the condition of circulation, pushing its velocity as far

toward the light-speed of information transmission as possible."[18] It becomes capital's strategy, as Marx foreshadows in the *Grundrisse,* to strive

> simultaneously for a greater extension of the market and for greater annihilation of space by time . . . There appears here the universalizing tendency of capital, which distinguishes it from all previous stages of production. Although limited by its very nature, it strives towards the universal development of the forces of production, and thus becomes the presupposition of a new mode of production, which is founded not on the development of the forces of production for the purpose of reproducing or at most expanding a given condition, but where free, unobstructed, progressive and universal development of the forces of production is itself the presupposition of society and hence of its reproduction; where advance beyond the point of departure is the only presupposition.[19]

The emphasis in post-Fordism on circulation is part of how capital restructures its organization of production so as to gain greater profit from other points in the circulation of capital. User data enables capitalists to more effectively allocate goods, services, and advertisements, and to engineer market choices so as to most likely provide a return on capitalist investment. Data mining is an essential part of what Jonathan Beller describes as the "financialization of culture," where "attention, interiority, self-image, imagination, social practices, relationships, and time" produce value through the collection of data about the subject that is used to segment and manage the market.[20]

Target marketing can be framed as a technology of risk management, where risk, as Randy Martin defines it, "can be distinguished from uncertainty as an expected outcome whose likelihood or value can be quantified. For risks to be reliably calculable, the future must look like the present."[21] Target marketing is a technique of turning the uncertainty about whether past consumer behaviors are likely to be reproduced in the future into risk that can be quantified, analyzed, and hedged. Beller also argues that advertising can be considered an "instrument of risk management" given that "risk management techniques account for the vagaries of subjective actors and intersubjective social dynamics by creating a spread. They are price indexes of volatility, calculi of capture networked via screens."[22] Target marketing helps capitalists to predict user behavior and modify the distributions of options and choices through the comparative analysis of user data. Target marketing also brings the future into the present so as to manage it by modulating the future choices of consumers using predictive analytics of user behavior.

If logistics can be traced to capital's desire to expand the market and annihilate space through time, this necessitates new means of communication and control over the distribution and allocation of goods, services, and advertisements. Logistical management is, as Bernes argues, "fundamentally different than other ensembles such as the Fordist factory; it saves on labour costs by decreasing the wage, rather than increasing the productivity of labour."[23] In the case of user data—particularly when data is used for both target marketing and managing supply chains and sites of distribution—wages are indeed decreased through logistics in the sense that capitalists are better able to forecast the amount of workers necessary to fulfill anticipated demand, thus cutting down on labor costs. However, data can also be used to intensify productivity expectations on workers.

Amazon is one example of a company that relies upon target marketing in order to accumulate profit. Amazon uses the data that users produce about themselves, particularly which goods are most frequently bought together and how user purchasing habits compare, in order to distribute recommendations and to minimize the inefficiencies of their warehouses. Amazon's ability to offer lower prices and to increase

capital gains is contingent upon the maximum productivity of their warehouses, made possible through the constant aggregation of data. The production of surplus value within the factory is accompanied by the production of information assets during both waged time and non-waged leisure time. But, as I will argue below, user data is better understood through the framework of logistical management rather than as a form of unremunerated user labor in the digital economy.

Attention Theories of Labor

One of the first scholars to address the idea that audiences produce value for capitalism is Dallas Smythe. Smythe identified what he called a "blindspot" in Marxist theory given that mass media communications were being analyzed as merely ideological or superstructural rather than through an historical materialist lens.[24] For Smythe, the audience was produced as a commodity that could be delivered and sold to advertisers, and thus he conceptualized watching time as a form of work under capitalism.[25] Smythe's analysis helped to incite a debate regarding the applicability of the Marxist labor theory of value for explaining the value produced out of audience attentiveness, and this debate has been revitalized in response to the rise of online advertising.

Christian Fuchs conceptualizes looking as a form of labor in the context of leisure time online, arguing that, "if the commodity of the mentioned Internet platforms is user data, then the process of creating these data must be considered to be value-generating labour."[26] In Fuchs' conceptualization of consumer attention as labor, the measurement of looking is a form of labor on behalf of the subjects paying attention. When Fuchs considers the relationship between what he describes as digital labor and time, he argues that all time is both the reproduction of labor power and labor time, given that data commodities are produced by social media at all times:

> On Facebook and Twitter, the consumption process of the service entails all online communication and usage time. All of this time is not only reproduction time (i.e. time for the reproduction of labour-power), but at the same time labour time that produces data commodities that are offered by Facebook and Twitter for sale to advertising clients. In the consumption process, the users do not just reproduce their labour-power but produce commodities. So on Facebook, Youtube, and Twitter, all consumption time is commodity-production time.[27]

Fuchs goes on to say that all time on social media therefore constitutes work time, given that all time is put in the service of profit realization and the production of data commodities, and that this necessarily entails constant surveillance.[28]

Beller also posits that labor can be used to describe the work of attention that produces value for capital. Beller's attention theory of value finds "in the notion of 'labor,' elaborated in Marx's labor theory of value, the prototype of the newest source of value production under capitalism today: value-producing human attention."[29] For Beller, the new frontier of capital is the commodification of the human body's capacity for attentiveness. In order to explain this point, Beller expands Marx's notion of the labor theory of value to include the commodification of attention. Beller's argument concerns the technologies not only of cinema but also of television, radio, computers, and the Internet, which for him are the "deterritorialized factories in which spectators work, that is, in which we perform value-productive labor."[30]

Target marketing commodifies attention in that the informational byproduct from one's online attentiveness is a source of data that can then be packaged, sorted, sold, and used to help allocate goods, services, and commodities. But in contrast to Beller's

understanding of attention as value-productive labor, where looking is a form of labor because it is productive of capital, I argue that in the case of target marketing, capital's ability to put leisure time outside the wage relation to use through information aggregation is best understood as part of an expansion of rentier capitalism, where data is under the monopoly control of a given platform or retailer and leased out. As David Harvey explains, "Monopoly rent arises because social actors can realize an enhanced income stream over an extended time by virtue of their exclusive control over some directly or indirectly tradable item which is in some crucial aspects unique and non-replicable."[31] Platforms have proprietary ownership over the data they collect on their users that they can then use to leverage over advertisers and suppliers alike.

As an alternative to audience labor theories of value popularized by Smythe, Beller, and Fuchs, where attention is conceptualized as a form of labor, Jakob Rigi and Robert Prey propose that:

> The money paid by advertisers to media is perhaps best understood as an exchange of rent for hope: the potential of generating greater future sales. Instead of the audience being the commodity, we argue that advertising space (in the case of press media) or advertising time (in the case of television) is the commodity. The price of such advertising space or time is dependent on the projected profile of the readers/viewers attracted to this space/time. Class, gender, generation, race, national differences, and corresponding cultural habituses, among other factors, are all major aspects of audiences' profiles.[32]

Given that there is a lack of any correspondence between the price of ads and the time spent online, Rigi and Prey argue that the labor theory of value is inapplicable for describing the unremunerated activity of users online. In order for the labor theory of value to apply, the activity of the audience has to produce value, and thus there must be a quantifiable measurement of time that corresponds to the time spent viewing. As Marx writes, "How, then, is the magnitude of this value to be measured? By means of the quantity of the value-forming substance, the labour, which it contains. This quantity is measured by its duration, and the labour-time is itself measured on the particular scale of hours, days, etc."[33] Labor and time are therefore inextricably linked, for Marx. But in the context of target marketing, the time spent viewing does not impact the value of user data; there is no relation between the value of advertising space/time as a commodity and the time spent online. The price of an ad is thus "a rent paid for advertising space/time, the magnitude of which primarily depends on the sociocultural profile of the audience . . . such data is best understood as a rent extracted through various mechanisms of monopoly."[34] Given that there is no temporal measurement used to assess attentiveness online, profit from audience data is not produced out of watching but out of the ability to gain rents in exchange for access to the data itself.

With target marketing, companies can raise advertising rates, i.e. extract more rent, if companies believe their ads are targeted to consumers most likely to provide a return on capitalist investment. As Chih-hsien Chen explains,

> the main purpose of advertising expenditure is to prevent a realization crisis… Like speculative businesses, commercial media systems provide outlets for uncommitted capital – not as the passive absorption of surplus, but as the active speculation for future exploitation.[35]

Platforms thus exercise monopoly ownership over the data that they aggregate from their user bases and accumulate rent from advertisers and financiers in exchange for access. Additionally, target marketing allows for capitalists to save on the unproductive labor

costs of advertisers, meaning labor which

> in the process of pure circulation does not produce use-values, therefore cannot add value or surplus value. It does not add to the production of use-values because it arises specifically with commodity production out of the problems of realizing the value of commodities.[36]

Given that target advertising automates much of the data collection, capitalists no longer need to invest in consumer polling and survey research and thus reduces overhead. Additionally, successful advertising helps to speed up the circulation of commodities by successfully pairing consumers with goods and services they are more likely to purchase. Rendering subjective behavior more predictable increases the possibility for economic returns.

For Mark Andrejevic, this aggregation of data can be described as a process of digital enclosure, "whereby activities formerly carried out beyond the monitoring capacity of the Internet are enfolded into its virtual space."[37] It is the creation of "an interactive realm wherein every action and transaction generates information about itself."[38] To access the digital enclosure as a user is to be willingly or unknowingly subject to conditions of surveillance. The digital enclosure, Andrejevic argues, is meant to gesture to the land enclosure movement that marks the transition from feudalism to capitalism, "the process whereby over time communal land was subjected to private control, allowing private landowners to set the conditions for its use."[39] There is a parallel between the ways that land was enclosed so that revenue could be extracted through the leasing of this land as rent, and that of digital enclosure, where data is treated as the private property of software platforms and corporations, and may be leased to advertisers and financial service providers. But it is not audience activity that produces value, but the construction of the "audience image" of an idealized, segmented audience providing anticipated returns that advertisers promise and profit from.[40]

The rent framework for understanding the political economy of social media thus prevents the conflation of novel forms of consumer activity related to data aggregation with labor. The understanding of user-generated data as a product of user labor, I argue, can flatten out distinctions between the capitalist structuring of labor and leisure and its relationship to time. Conceiving of consumer activity as labor would require a wholesale rethinking of the categories of value, labor, and capital. Rather than seeing target marketing as a technique for exploiting the labor of looking, I argue that in many cases it operates as a *laborsaving* technology once it is conceptualized as a technique of logistical management.

Target Marketing As A Laborsaving Technology

Thus far, this article has sought to conceptualize why user data is better understood within the framework of rent as opposed to labor. It is also the case that user data has downstream effects on actual sites of labor. For instance, the use of consumer data for arbitraging the labor market is evident in Mac McClelland's account of her time as a fulfillment center worker at Amalgamated Inc., a third-party warehouse partnered with online retailers. These retailers use the data that users produce about themselves when consuming and browsing online not only to know how to best pre-position goods through user preferences and through the monitoring of which items are most frequently bought together, but also to minimize the inefficiencies of their warehouses. There is, according to Mac McClelland, a journalist who infiltrated Amalgamated Inc., no room for inefficiencies because the ability to offer lower prices and to increase capital gains is contingent upon the maximum productivity of their warehouses, which is made possible

through the constant aggregation of data from every point in the circulation of capital. Consumer data analysis allows retailers to "track products and reduce operational cost while also serving as a tool for product promotions through various digital platforms."[41] Through the data collected about user and worker behavior, firms are able to determine "the exact number of humans it should take to fill this week's orders if we work at top capacity."[42] Retailers are thus able to arbitrage the labor market by relying on temp agencies that use consumer demand trends to determine the fewest number of employees needed in order to maximize profits. As McClelland explains,

> Maximizing profits means making sure no employee has a slow day, means having only as many employees as are necessary to get the job done, the number of which can be determined and ordered from a huge pool of on-demand labor literally by the day. Often, temp workers have to call in before shifts to see if they'll get work. Sometimes, they're paid piece rate, according to the number of units they fill or unload or move. Always, they can be let go in an instance, and replaced just as quickly.[43]

Companies like Amazon are able to offer free shipping, speedy delivery, and low prices to consumers precisely because of their ability to cut down on labor costs by relying on temporary, precarious, part-time work that responds reflexively to levels of consumer demand.

While both workers and consumers are subject to technologies of surveillance, consumers are nudged—meaning guided by structures of incentives—through the choice-making architecture of target marketing.[44] Workplace surveillance, on the other hand, disciplines workers through the relationship between wages and the quantification of labor-power through indices of time:

> Lunch is *not* 30 minutes and 1 second—that's a penalty-point-earning offense—and that includes the time to get through the metal detectors and use the disgustingly overcrowded bathroom—the suggestion board hosts several pleas that someone do something about that smell—and time to stand in line to clock out and back in.[45]

Workers in fulfillment centers are continuously tracked not only through the use of punch cards for clocking in and out, but through the use of scanners that determine how long workers take to move and pack various products:

> Dallas sector, section yellow, row H34, bin 22, level D: wearable blanket. Battery-operated flour sifter. Twenty seconds. I count how many steps it takes me to speed-walk to my destination: 20. At 5-foot-9, I've got a decently long stride, and I only cover the 20 steps *and* locate the exact shelving unit in the allotted time if I don't hesitate for one second or get lost or take a drink of water before heading in the right direction as fast as I can walk or even occasionally jog.[46]

The data from the scanners is also used to determine productivity goals that seem to constantly intensify, and that require the worker to internalize this form of clock discipline by moving as fast as possible and maximizing the efficiency of all time spent "on" and "off" the clock. Additionally, as determined by the recent, and unanimous, 2014 Supreme Court decision, businesses like fulfillment centers do not have to compensate employees for the time spent waiting in line to enter and exit the workplace as it was thought not to be "integral and indispensible" to the workers' jobs, despite being a mandatory part of the workday.[47] Similarly, in the case of the class action lawsuit against

Apple for unpaid time during bag searches, it was determined that since workers have the "choice" not to bring a bag to work, Apple is not responsible to pay workers for their time being searched.[48] The use of information aggregation both inside and outside the workplace demonstrates how societies of control are concerned with the rapid and flexible accumulation of information during leisure time in order to manage consumer desire as well as extract surplus value created by physical labor.[49] But the discipline of the clock is what differentiates labor-time from leisure-time surveillance.

Viewing leisure-time data aggregation as a form of logistical management—rather than unremunerated labor—clarifies the distinction between the commercial surveillance of leisure time and workplace surveillance of labor structured by the wage relation. Both forms of surveillance contribute to the circulation of capital but under conditions that are radically different. McClelland clearly conveys the ways that workers are subject to conditions of surveillance that correlate to the fact that their time is not conceptualized as "free" but owned by capitalists, and therefore highly regimented, quantified, and enforced in order to ensure productivity gains and "satisfactory" customer experiences.[50] In contrast, online users browsing the web during leisure time are not subject to the same time constraints and conditions, given that this time is conceptualized as "free" leisure time. Thus, while workers are disciplined through surveillance that enforces the equivalence of the wage with time and have little to no control over their working environments, consumers are managed through their ability to make choices. The data accumulated about consumer demand provides a means of intensifying the work-place regulation of workers like McClelland through ever-increasing productivity goals and makes possible the predetermination of the amount of temporary workers necessary while simultaneously working to distribute risks and rewards to consumers based on their data profiles.

Conclusion

This analysis of target marketing and its dependency on leisure time surveillance illustrates the ways ordinary life is increasingly subjected to technologies of surveillance. Ubiquitous surveillance is a key characteristic of post-Fordist societies of control, societies organized according to the flexible accumulation of capital made possible by information technologies like target marketing. Target marketing makes subjective behavior classifiable, marketable, traceable, and legible, ultimately containing, managing, and exploiting the productive power of subjects while concentrating power over suppliers, laborers, and consumers alike through logistical management. I would like to close with a brief discussion of the political implications of an analysis that treats user activity as a form of unremunerated labor.

Online users in Fuch's model are victims of infinite exploitation because they produce unremunerated user generated content and produce information that is sold as a commodity to third-party advertisers:

> While no product is sold to the users, the users themselves are sold as a commodity to advertisers. The more users a platform has, the higher the advertising rates can be charged. The productive labor time that is exploited by capital, on the one hand, involves the labor time of the paid employees and, on the other hand, all of the time that is spent online by the users.[51]

This reading seems to contradict the idea that what scientific knowledge and technology provide is precisely not the lengthening of the hours of work (and therefore absolute surplus value) but rather raise the productivity of already existing labor.[52] This model of user labor also results in the understanding that users are subject to a rate of exploitation

that "converges toward infinity" given that users "work completely for free."[53] Fuch's understanding of exploitation makes it difficult to distinguish the different conditions of labor and leisure that structure relations of power in the digital economy and suggests that one hundred percent of an online user's time is hyper-exploited surplus labor time.

However, one should hesitate to fold the data trails, meaning the residues of practices of online consumption and attentiveness, into a form of labor under generalized conditions of capital accumulation. In contrast to the argument that labor can be used to describe the value produced out of user-data online, the intervention this paper makes is to consider user attention as part of a logistically coordinated digital economy in which the profit accumulated through user activity online is better understood as a labor-saving technology to the extent that it can be used to regiment the allocation of advertisements, goods, and services, and allows for the increased rationalization of labor within fulfillment centers, supply chains, and advertising. This understanding of the digital economy works to refocus attention on the connections between the advertising industry, fulfillment center labor in the U.S., and the extraction of data from the entire network of workers and consumers rather than emphasizing a generalization of labor, which works to flatten these distinctions. I hope that by situating the extraction of profit from user attentiveness and online consumption within the circulation of capital, this framework can attend to the qualitative and quantitative distinctions between sites of production, distribution, and consumption, and their mutually reinforcing logics and technologies of surveillance in the logistically coordinated world of target markets.

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Bio



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Ethics, Collaboration, and Knowledge Production: Digital Storytelling with Sexually Diverse Farmworkers in California

Tania Lizarazo, Elisa Oceguera, David Tenorio, Diana Pardo Pedraza and Robert McKee Irwin

ABSTRACT This article outlines the digital storytelling methods used for a community based research project focused on issues of sexuality among California farmworkers: Sexualidades Campesinas. We note how our process of collaboration in the creation and production of digital stories was shaped by the context and our envisioned storytellers. We then offer a critical analysis of our own unique experience with digital storytelling in this project, focusing on a handful of concepts key to understanding the nature of our collaborative production process: community, affect and collaboration, storytelling, performance, and mediation, with an eye to the problem of ethics.

In 2011, we launched *Sexualidades Campesinas*, a digital storytelling project aimed at making visible issues related to the sexual diversity of immigrant farmworkers in California. We chose digital storytelling as part of a critical paradigm on Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) that facilitates the expression of personal stories of individuals with little or no access to the public sphere (e.g., oral history, *testimonio*, documentary film, ethnographic interviews, etc.). The promise offered by digital storytelling methods for maximizing storytellers' agency in the production process and the accessibility of audiovisual stories as final product attracted us for its ethical potential. We envisioned a collaborative process of knowledge production building on practices of community engagement and engaged scholarship.[1] However, our project, while oriented to community needs, could not be carried out in the same way as other community-based digital storytelling projects due to the need for anonymity on the part of potential storytellers, who—we thought—would not be ready to assume a public posture on their sexuality, and who, depending on their immigration status, indeed might not be ready to assume a public position at all.

We decided not to use a workshop format with groups of potential storytellers, and instead worked one-on-one, or in small groups. While our use of digital storytelling veered from a typical model of digital storytelling, we nonetheless believed that this genre was the right one for our project. Still, we remained concerned about the ethics of our collaboration with this vulnerable population, and therefore maintained a posture of self-criticism at every stage. Did digital storytelling methods, altered by the idiosyncrasies of our project, allow us to minimize our role as mediators and to ensure that storytellers assumed maximum ownership of their stories? In this article, we first outline the methods that have guided our project, noting how they differ from other approaches to collaboration in the creation and production of digital stories as laid out by Joe Lambert and the StoryCenter (formerly Center for Digital Storytelling).[2] We then offer a critical analysis of our own unique experience with digital storytelling, focusing on a handful of

concepts key to understanding the nature of our collaborative production process: community, affect and collaboration, storytelling, performance, and mediation.

Our writing embraces "we" as a subject of enunciation, a strategy to foreground the role of collaboration and collective knowledge of *Sexualidades Campesinas*. "We" marks us as a research group in order to accept responsibility for the research design and our motivation for publishing, which are interests we share (and which differentiate us) as scholars.[3] We are aware of the potential of erasing the heterogeneity of backgrounds, identities, positionalities, and roles of the members of our group. But, we use this collective identity to highlight the outcomes of our negotiation over the tensions and differences during the process of digital storytelling and writing this article. Our "we" reflects an ongoing commitment to thinking, learning, and writing together. This collaborative paradigm of "we" reflects Community-Based Participatory Research's commitment to transform and reevaluate scholarship practices within the academy, particularly in the humanities. To think, learn, and write collectively is a necessary step to democratize the epistemic practice of knowledge production in spite of differences and tensions, especially in the construction of an ongoing dialogue between intellectual communities inside and out the academy.

Sexualidades Campesinas

Sexualidades Campesinas is a critical public humanities project, funded by Cal Humanities, the California Studies Consortium of the University of California's Humanities Resource Institute, and the University of California's Institute for Mexico and the United States (commonly known as UC MEXUS), that focuses on issues of sexual diversity among rural farm workers of California's Central Valley and Central Coast regions. It aims, through the techniques of digital storytelling, to enable sexually heterodox farmworkers to produce personal stories of their everyday experiences, struggles, and triumphs whose public dissemination they believe would benefit other sexually diverse farmworkers. We used the category of "sexually heterodox" as interchangeable with LGBTQI but we decided to foreground it to recognize the different politics of sexual identities of our collaborators for whom LGBTQI can be an externally imposed category. Our mediation, which required great care, informed our preference for vague terms such as "sexual diversity" or "sexual heterogeneity" rather than more politically charged and reductive terms such as "gay," "lesbian," "queer," or "homosexual." And although our project did not target a specific nationality, the majority of our storytellers identify as Mexican or Mexican American.

Most representations of rural farm workers portray them as single heterosexual men, as married men who may be temporarily separated from their families, as entire families; or even as children, who have sometimes been exploited as farm laborers. Sexual diversity is rarely associated with this population. However, recent research on Mexican masculinities, farmworker sexuality, and migration suggests that there is no reason to expect that the lived experience of laborers working in rural California coincides at all with well-known stereotypes.[4] Thus, the reality of sexual diversity among California's farmworkers remains largely invisible, even within farm worker communities. The invisibility of sexually heterodox farmworkers is, on the one hand, the product of homophobia that makes individuals reluctant to "come out" publicly, even within their communities or their own families, and, on the other hand, may be the result of their reluctance to make any aspect of their lives visible to a world that is suspicious of and unwelcoming to farm laborers, particularly Spanish speakers, who are often assumed to be undocumented. Their invisibility, along with the possibility that many sexually heterodox farmworkers may not conform to mainstream US (or Mexican) notions of sexual categories, makes it difficult for community service organizations to offer

appropriate services to this group, or for farmworker communities themselves to establish support structures. The provision of appropriate services to this population and the establishment of support structures are further complicated by the rural setting of these farm work communities.

Sexualidades Campesinas's website currently hosts five digital stories created in collaboration with six storytellers, whose collaboration began in 2010. All stories have been published digitally and bilingually on our website: http://sexualidadescampesinas.ucdavis.edu/. Even though our IRB narrative—written before we started recruitment—stated we would guarantee the anonymity of storytellers, all participants chose to use their real names and even include pictures and videos from their personal archives. Overall, participation in the project reflected a deep commitment to the project as participants were not paid and the production of each story required between ten and twenty hours with facilitators. The immediate audience of the stories was limited to other storytellers and their circles, but audiences at community and campus public forums in the Sacramento metropolitan region, as well as at academic meetings in the United States, Mexico and Costa Rica also experienced the emotional power of the stories.

Digital Storytelling: Foundational Practices and Project Improvisations

Digital storytelling employs collaborative processes of production that can empower storytellers, regardless of their experience or education level, to tell the stories that they wish to tell. Incorporating formal narrative techniques and selecting visual images, whether still or moving, helps ensure that their stories will make the impact they envision.

Digital storytelling stands out from other genres of Community-Based Participatory Research, such as oral history, *testimonio*, documentary film, or ethnographic interviews, for the degree of agency that community storytellers assume in creation and production. As a collaborative method, digital storytelling challenges research hierarchies in which only the researcher decides on the contents of the final narrative, and draws attention to questions regarding ethical uses of technology and the political uses of self-representation and dissemination. Using everyday devices—such as disposable cameras, smartphones, and laptop computers—and freeware or otherwise easy to obtain software such as Audacity and iMovie, and employing easily learned techniques for the creation, production, and editing of digitally produced audiovisual narratives—mini-documentary films, of a sort—digital storytelling is a democratizing storytelling genre, an expression of "vernacular creativity"[5] that allows just about anyone to produce a polished, internet-ready, visually attractive narrative. Nick Couldry argues that "digital storytelling contributes to a democratization of media resources and widening the conditions of democracy itself. Digital storytelling vastly extends the number of people who at least in principle can be registered as contributing to the public sphere."[6]

Digital storytelling participatory media techniques—as developed by the StoryCenter in Berkeley, California, which over the past two decades has "manag[ed] over 200 small- to large-scale projects, [led] over 1000 workshops, and assist[ed] more than 15,000 individuals to complete films"—follow a set of procedures with which an informed facilitator can enable a group (e.g., a community assembly, a class of students, an activist organization) to construct and produce personal stories.[7] The group itself does most of the work, with the facilitator guiding and teaching the community to administer its own collective production process.

We were aware from the beginning that such a collective process would not apply to our project. There are very few community groups focusing on issues of sexual diversity in the rural and semirural settings in which most immigrant farmworkers live and work. And

even if such groups existed, many sexually heterodox farmworkers would be unlikely to feel comfortable discussing very private aspects of their lives in such public forums. Of course, a digital storytelling project that aims to post personal narratives on a website is also a public forum. However, our project protocol was established so as to guarantee the anonymity of all community partners we spoke to, save for those who agreed to reveal identifying details such as their faces, voices, names, or any other traits or specific anecdotes that might risk compromising their privacy. We could not expect to employ the "story circle" model suggested by the StoryCenter; instead we would resort to improvisation.

We knew that even though the devices and techniques used for digital storytelling are more accessible than the devices and techniques used in other audiovisual genres, they are not universally available. We saw some of our own collaborators struggle with access to technology. We were told stories about using phones to write school essays or losing pictures from archives of outdated or broken laptops. In contrast, our own equipment included Zoom recorders and Flip and Canon cameras, and each research member owned a laptop and a smartphone (almost exclusively MacBooks and iPhones). These symbols of our privilege as academics were reminders of the challenges of establishing a collaboration relationship, which was what attracted us to digital storytelling as methodology in the first place. Our commitment to our version of digital storytelling arose from embracing a very self-conscious collaboration as the center of our methodology. Acutely aware that we could not "eradicat[e]" our own "expert" power,[8] we realized that we needed to acknowledge that digital storytelling is inevitably a product of "co-creativity;"[9] nonetheless, it was important to us to seek out strategies to minimize our interventions as mediators so that our storyteller collaborators would be confident in their roles as primary authors and directors of their digital stories. This movement towards the recognition of the politics of positionality in creative collaboration and knowledge production opened up spaces to decentralize academia in the representation of immigrants. Dialogue and collaboration needed to be at the center in representing LGBTQI farmworkers, while using our privilege and resources to create the visibility that our collaborators wanted.

And as we moved forward, developing our own method of one-on-one collaborations in digital storytelling, we experienced a process that was highly labor intensive−—no economies of scale——and whose ethical dimensions were unclear. How could we work one-on-one, or in groups that inverted digital storytelling methodology by involving two or more facilitators in the production of a single storyteller's story, and yet ensure that community storytellers maintained agency of their stories without feeling undue influence from facilitators, and felt complete ownership of their stories? While practitioners of digital storytelling have begun questioning the ethics of the particular collaborative processes underlying this genre,[10] and we had addressed some of these in advance (e.g., our procedures regarding consent and confidentiality were carefully crafted to avoid harm and to guarantee storytellers the opportunity to withdraw from the project at any time—and even to have their videos removed from our website after completion), but the issue of what Aline Gubrium, Amy Hill, and Sarah Flicker refer to as the "power of shaping" loomed large throughout the course of our project. [11]

Community

As researchers interested in collaborating with the "community"—an inexistent collective manifestation of our imagined collaborators—the very process of identifying a community that fits the parameters of the *Sexualidades Campesinas* project is challenging. For example, mainstream LGBTQI community organizations seem largely unaware of, and lack strategies to reach sexually heterodox immigrant farmworkers; likewise what community

organizations do exist among farmworkers—whether focused on issues of health, labor, family, education, law, etc.—rarely address issues related to sexual diversity. As we struggled to design an ethical community-based research protocol, we committed to working not with organizations, but with individuals whose experiences are not universally understood nor shared through a sense of community, let alone documented in an archive. Community, in reference to farmworkers with diverse sexualities and gender identities, became a difficult notion to pin down.

The temporality of farm labor itself offered another set of challenges. The transitory nature of seasonal work means that whatever communities form in a given place may be ephemeral, and our storytellers were not necessarily likely to stay put and form part of a rooted community wherever they were working that season, and even if they did, the irregularity of their work schedules (very long hours during the harvest season, or piecemeal odd jobs in the off-season) was not necessarily conducive to their becoming an active member of any community. In working with several research participants from different geographic locations, it became evident that there was very little sense of community amongst sexually diverse farmworkers. We noted that even farm labor was an abstraction that tied workers together only loosely.

Another important factor that limits community building is the taboo of discussing non-heterosexual and non-cisgender difference within immigrant and farm working communities. While in much of Mexico sexual diversity has become part of everyday life, whether in the streets or in the media, and legal advances on issues such as gay marriage, adoption by same-sex couples, and transgender rights have made the news, California's farmworkers hail mainly from rural areas of Mexico where intolerance remains prominent.[12] While we met storytellers who wanted to tell the world about their experiences, there were others who wanted to tell their story, but not necessarily in such a public manner. And we encountered others who were interested in our project, but unwilling to participate, even anonymously.

The notion of community, of an imagined community of sexually diverse farmworkers, was key to the participation of others. Storytellers expressed their desire to connect with others who shared similar experiences and interest in constructing community ties in a real material way, hoping that our website might help bring people together. But apart from their networks—groups of friends or links to urban or internet-based social and cultural organizations that did little to welcome migrant farmworkers—our storytellers did not see themselves as part of any definable LGBTQI community.

For all these reasons, the embodied experience of working in the genre of digital storytelling—whose methods are conceived to be community-based, in a context where the imagined community in question does not exist in any material way—serves as a constructive place to question our very invocation of community. In terms of ethics, the idea of a community, both ungraspable and utilitarian, is a constant reminder that our process is not participatory in and of itself. The notion of community is often evoked as a way to express an end rather than a means. Community is both implicit and abstract. While many grassroots digital storytelling projects are initiated by community groups and start from the assumption of the group's own stability, our project posited community as a formation in the making, a process aimed at establishing connections.[13] Everyday notions of community often assume a stagnant, fixed entity—an entity that creates boundaries, definitions, and an ontological stasis.[14]

The concept of community for *Sexualidades Campesinas* is instead a contested term. Community carries with it political implications that change over time and space. While difficult to pin down, community is a useful tool for understanding the practice of

engaging in a shared space with others. In our efforts to conceptually grasp and name a particular experience, it became evident that any notion of an LGBTQI farmworker community as a stable and homogeneous group was not meaningful or helpful. Indeed, it became clear that it was more useful to assume a more critical perspective toward such notions, and to imagine communities as plural and constantly in flux, ambiguously defined and heterogeneous—more akin to the notion of "assemblage" employed by some social theorists.[15]

As researchers, we found ourselves working with a number of different participants who imagined themselves "in community" with different groups, and whose particular experiences of sexual diversity did not necessarily coincide with those of others comprising these groups. Our community-based research is, then, more than a two-way negotiation with difference and ethics. It is a community of assemblages. Furthermore, many of the individuals who signed on to contribute their own digital stories did not know of other sexually diverse farmworkers, let alone see themselves as part of a community of sexually diverse farmworkers. Indeed, one of the digital stories produced for our project outright rejects the use of abstract unifying categories: "*Hombre, mujer o pescado*" (Man, Woman or Fish) ends with a monologue promoting self-acceptance by rejecting identity categories (e.g. lesbian, gay, straight) and instead embracing that we all are just "*personas amando al amor*" (people loving love).

On the other hand, the lack of defined community organizations did not necessarily mean that our storytellers did not wish to access some kind of community of sexually diverse farmworkers. Our establishment of a bilingual website (http://sexualidadescampesinas.ucdavis.edu/en/about-the-project/) assembling digital stories of sexually heterodox farmworkers helped some of them to envision this community, and may, perhaps, eventually bring it into more concrete being. Designing a virtual space that was accessible to English and Spanish speakers represented a strategy to allow storytellers to construct community, at least in this digital manifestation, on their own terms. Every storyteller consented to share their story publicly and agreed that an online presence could be helpful to other sexually diverse farmworkers facing similar challenges to the ones they share in their stories.

Negotiating questions of visibility is an ethical concern of our process. There are constant tensions between revealing the particularities of each story and generalizing the experience of being an LGBTQI farmworker, as well as between sharing stories publicly and protecting storytellers' decisions of what not to reveal. Visibility is also a major ethical component of our participants' decisions to tell their stories, as they chose to be vulnerable when consenting to share their stories publicly. The will to participate in the project itself indicated to us a great need to draw material connections within the farm working community. We asked ourselves, "Who is telling us their story?" All of our storytellers are, in fact, farmworkers (or former farmworkers) who had already worked through many of the issues regarding the potential visibility of their difference prior to meeting us. In some cases they, or other contacts of ours, told us of other farmworkers whose stories might be of interest to our project, but who ultimately chose not to tell their stories or, in some cases, even speak to us.

The process of identifying a potential community itself was, then, quite daunting; still, this non-existent community forced us to think through the purpose of community-based research approaches. Our intent was not to perform community, yet we acknowledge that creating a website where singular narratives are curated under the theme of "sexualidades campesinas" gives this impression. Our presence on the internet undoubtedly will serve as a space for individuals to connect with each other, or, at the very least, to see parts of their experiences reflected on the website. It is clear to us that both

temporality and space are important factors in the question of constructions of community.[16] We also recognize that the process of making stories visible (e.g. through public and mass media) is itself a process of community formation.

However, in the end we were left with a number of methodological and ethical questions: How well do these two to three minute stories narrated by these storytellers represent a larger community experience? And if the community does not exist, how does one particular representation connect to another, even if both present themselves as representing an experience they believe to be important to this imagined community? Is their final project, a very brief digital story, actually capable of communicating some representative account of a given participant's experience or vision? Furthermore, are these stories, which are unlikely to be revised any further once they are published online, capable of capturing to any significant degree the fluidity and dynamism of community? And finally, as any notions of community constructed through this project must be extrapolated from the stories posted on our website, limited as they are by the circumstances described above, how limited is this project's community building potential? These questions, obvious in the case of our idiosyncratic digital storytelling project, signal similar dynamics in more conventional digital storytelling projects, as well as any other form of community-based research.

Collaboration: Affect and Intimacy

As a methodology that seeks to help people to find or reclaim their voices and tell their stories in an emotionally compelling way, digital storytelling is, to a certain extent, about touching, moving oneself and others. It is about embracing subjectivity and uncertainty in order to connect ethically with each other. As expressed by Jean Burgess, "[f]or the storyteller, the digital story is a means of 'becoming real' to others, on the basis of shared experience and affective resonances. Many of the stories are, quite literally, *touching*."[17] Undoubtedly, there is an affective dimension in crafting and sharing one's own story, perhaps even more so if one is to tell it in a three to five minute video. The hope is that this emotional dimension is evoked when others watch the digital story. Photos, narratives, whole stories might recapture the warmth of human intimacy and affective processes of self-recognition, social identity, family reconfiguration, etc. Because these videos seek to enact and present stories of people's lives that might not be heard otherwise, the point of departure of digital storytelling here is always already affectively charged. Recognizing the emotional dimension in community-based research practices enables a dismantling of the hierarchies of knowledge production that are solely based on academic disciplinary inquiry. Digital visual media offers potentialities for reflecting about affect in community-based participatory methods with which to capture ephemeral nuances of working in collaboration and creating a sense of community.

The process of crafting a warmly compelling personal tale, of finding a unique voice, and of arranging meaningful pictures takes time, effort and, in our case, multiple encounters. Our approach to digital storytelling differs, as we have already stated, from the methodology used at the StoryCenter, which is laid out in Joe Lambert's helpful guide.[18] Our mostly one-on-one collaborations have often taken place in private and insulated settings. Ethics played a role in how, when, and where to meet: we developed relationships with storytellers even before we starting working on the digital storytelling process, working hard to establish non-hierarchical relationships of mutual trust. The intimate atmosphere in these encounters has produced an especially pronounced bonding experience between collaborators and facilitators and has formed relationships marked by a profound sense of confidence and intimacy.

Before explaining further, it is important to highlight that in a project such as ours,

intimacy is not reduced to the individual, since storytelling is a form that expresses a collective intimacy. The storytelling process itself, similar to the form of oral histories, brings about a kind of intimacy that is meant to be shared. In turn, the responsibility of building trust and respect with every storyteller became greater as we advanced in the process and thought about each story.

Constructing an emotionally captivating story may be challenging and sometimes frightening, particularly when it may involve topics such as "coming out," non-normative romantic relationships, family rejection, and social discrimination. As Lambert states, "[t]hose of us who have assisted people in trying to reclaim their voice know that it requires a tremendous sensitivity to successfully bring people to a point where they trust that the stories they do tell are vital, emotionally powerful, and unique."[19] In order to help our collaborators to think about the stories they needed to tell and to find the voice they wanted to explore, we tried to create a supportive environment by sharing personal stories of our own. Our ethical approach to digital storytelling is based on vulnerability and reciprocity, which does not negate the existence of power relations, but seeks to minimize them. Moving beyond the introduction of ourselves and the required presentation of the *Sexualidades Campesinas* project, we told our own personal narratives: from home anecdotes to migration stories, from love tales to romantic disappointments, from sibling rivalries to family bonding experiences, and from professional frustrations to academic achievements. Telling our narratives helped to establish a safe space where storytellers could talk about their own personal lives and experiences, which created in turn a personal and emotional bond between participants and facilitators in the project.

Indeed, sharing stories of our own was, to a certain degree, our strategy to establish and consolidate a rapport with our community collaborators—an experience that echoes arguments made by Geraldine Bloustien regarding participatory video research: "Mutual respect and trust, achieved only through [. . .] culturally sensitive and nonjudgmental engagement [. . .], provided the essential underpinning to successful [collaborative] relationships."[20] From our very first encounters with potential storytellers, we were certain of the importance of manifesting possible points of convergence, making evident our own identities and alliances. Very early in the project, we highlighted the fact that some of us were from Latin America or work on Latin American issues, that we speak Spanish and English, that we have ample experience working with Latino communities in the United States or with queer communities in Mexico, that we were involved in either normative or non-normative romantic relationships, and that we identify ourselves with particular ideas and practices of masculinity and femininity, among others. These efforts were an expression of our own critical thinking, particularly in relation to traditional protocols in storytelling. In exposing ourselves by sharing personal experiences and stories, we seek to trouble widespread notions of expertise and authority and question the conventional dynamic between storyteller and listener, where the former is open and vulnerable while the latter is a passive receptor.

The level of trust and intimacy that we were able to achieve was not taken for granted; it was not settled once and organically maintained. Rather, it required constant work; like a muscle, it needed to be exercised. This constant performance exemplifies ethics as an everyday practice. But, *ordinary ethics* is not only the potential to find ethics in daily actions: "the sensibility by which we recognize the ethical in the small acts of everyday life also alerts us to the lethal ways in which our capacity to hurt others might also be expressed in completely quotidian ways."[21] In order to create a safe space for decision-making and storytelling that did not transform vulnerability into hazard, we tried to maintain and strengthen our rapport with storytellers by meeting with them frequently

and in private spaces. While some of our encounters indeed took place at restaurants and coffee shops, many of them were at either their homes or ours; in some occasions we had the opportunity to spend time with their family members and close friends, and vice versa. In addition, we tried to use such meetings not only to work on the creative storytelling process, but also to take part in other activities we all were passionate about. That is how we came to eat homemade Mexican food, share margaritas, and perform karaoke together.

Indeed, while our relationships with our community collaborators were traversed by the digital storytelling project of *Sexualidades Campesinas*, our experiences together went far beyond it. By spending time creating the rapport described above over a period of months, we actually exceeded the storyteller/facilitator relationship and became quite good friends. Our presence in their lives and houses was undoubtedly attached to this digital project; sometimes we were those who were trying to manage time and assign tasks and responsibilities for the next meeting. Yet, there were other moments when we could only chat and share some tangential tales that were not directly related to the storytelling process. Sometimes we were not as productive as we wanted to be; life circumstances sometimes demanded that conversation prevail. There was excess; there was not a clear division between their project story and other personal experiences. In contrast to what the workshop format might allow, our one-on-one encounters with storytellers were fluid and organic—if a bit unwieldy.

However, regardless of how close and intimate our relationship with storytellers came to be, our personal and working experiences were quite different from theirs. Our social roles are unavoidably different, even if we create spaces in which we may suspend consciousness that ethics is about learning how to deal with difference. Several of our meetings made that evident. On several occasions one community collaborator, María Cárdenas, suggested a meeting on a day when it turned out she was coming home from a twelve or fourteen hour work shift, whether in a walnut processing plant or in searing hot tomato fields. While she did her best to work on the writing and recording processes on those days, it was clear for us that she was tired and indisposed, and that there was nothing we could do to alleviate the situation, other than reschedule the meeting. One storyteller, Carina López, was undergoing a gender transition that affected her both physically and emotionally, at times limiting our meetings and her participation in the storytelling production. Instances such as these reminded us that while we were in alliance with our community collaborators, working together to build camaraderie and friendship as well as a digital story project, their daily lives, struggles, and preoccupations were different from ours, which subsequently reduced their level of involvement in the project at some moments. This is also to say that the working and affective relationship established between storytellers and facilitators was certainly influenced by the facets that define us not only as potential collaborators but also as social subjects—that is, being farmers, students, professors, parents, etc.

Storytelling

A major element of our collaborations focused specifically on telling personal stories. Storytelling is part of everyday life, a central element of many genres of lettered culture, including literary fiction, historiography, ethnography, biography, and epistolography; it is likewise a major component of mass media culture, whether commercial cinema, documentary film, television comedies and dramas, social media, newscasts, sports reporting, or even advertising. Storytelling, however, does not have its origins in media or print culture; it is also fundamental to oral culture. And while oral storytelling may fulfill some formal functions of recording history, defining values, or imparting wisdom across a culture, it is also a part of everyday life in which most everyone participates, which is why

it made sense with regard to our ethical aspirations. As Joe Lambert puts it:

> Everyday [*sic*], with virtually no effort, you tell stories to other people. At the water cooler, the dinner table, walking your child to school, you find yourself reciting an event from memory to make a point, to give a "case" where the attitudes and actions of the characters provide insight to your audience.[22]

StoryCenter suggests thinking about a range of storytelling genres: character stories, memorial stories, adventure stories, accomplishment stories, place oriented stories, stories about livelihood or profession, recovery stories, love stories, discovery stories, dream stories, and coming of age stories.[23] It also suggests following seven storytelling steps within its community workshop format: 1) owning your insights; 2) owning your emotions; 3) finding the moment; 4) seeing your story; 5) hearing your story; 6) assembling your story, and 7) sharing your story.[24] A key element of the workshop format is the story circle, "the heart of the entire process," which permits community members to think through the stories they'd like to tell together.[25] The StoryCenter methodology also calls for workshop facilitators to provide one-on-one support to storytellers as they elaborate their narratives.

As we have explained, our own process differs from the StoryCenter model for reasons discussed above. Without the infrastructure of community workshops, we could not use story circles to help storytellers focus in on the stories they wanted to tell and how they wanted to tell them. The methodological implications of the absence of this collective exercise imply a different story circle. We all shared stories but not all the stories were meant to become public. But even if this different participation strengthened our roles as facilitators, our revision of this existing methodology allowed us to take more time with each story and storyteller, creating the intimacy and trust that made the stories possible, while shaping our consciousness of an ethics of collaboration. This transformation shows the need to shape methodologies collectively based on the specific needs of collaborators for a specific project instead of imposing a generic methodology that does not fit the particular context at hand.

Given our particular circumstances, the role of facilitators engaging in one-on-one support in the storytellers' creative process loomed larger, creating the possibility of a heavier-handed intervention on our part. Ever conscious of the potentially overbearing weight of anything we contributed to discussions during the story creating process, we chose to minimize our influence in the crafting of the narratives by leaving out any discussion of the seven storytelling steps, instead trusting our community collaborators' instincts to shape their own stories through whatever process they chose. However, the dynamic of a process that was based on a relationship not between a collectivity of community members and a team of facilitators, but rather between individuals (whose relationship to community remained abstract) and facilitators, altered the dynamic of digital storytelling methodology, and constantly raised issues regarding the extent to which our process implied that the facilitator might easily take on a role approximating that of coauthor.

We approached the storytelling process self-consciously and critically, making a constant effort to minimize our interventions into community storytellers' creative processes. However, this did not mean that we did not collaborate actively. A simultaneous (and ultimately greater) priority for us was to encourage community storytellers to take ownership of the storytelling process, which also implied not refusing to intervene, but rather allowing them to decide when and how much it was appropriate for us to participate.

We tried not to impose any specific notions of what makes a good story, or introduce any specific structural elements of effective stories. Instead we presented the genre of digital storytelling, showed some examples of digital stories—at first, from StoryCenter, and then, our project's stories once we had them—and discussed with our storytellers what they liked or did not like about them, and how they might or might not be effective in communicating their implicit messages via the internet (the main site of distribution that we were proposing for our project). We saw how different stories used images to complement or reiterate the audio. We talked about an imagined audience and the goals of storytelling. We then engaged in brainstorming discussions with our storytellers about what kind of stories they wanted to tell.

A few strategies we endeavored to incorporate into our discussions with storytellers were meant to minimize our interventions. We strove to establish our roles with storytellers not as expert authorities but as equals by, as outlined above, spending significant time building relationships as both working collaborators and friends. We also kept the limitations of the genre of digital storytelling on the table without insisting upon always respecting its limitations. For example, while we were trained to produce digital stories using still images (photographs), when one of our storytellers, Tania Solorio, insisted on wanting to use film clips for her story, we decided it made sense to purchase a video camera to film these sequences. While indeed moving images are not foreign to the genre, its most traditional form involves only still images, which has historically made it easy and inexpensive for anyone to produce a digital story—although contemporary smartphone technology has essentially altered this scenario. Storytellers did not necessarily think in terms of still or moving images, but rather in terms of images, which led them to film some of their own video clips or to offer up old home movies, which we were able to digitize and incorporate into their digital stories.

We aimed to be producers, enabling the stories to get made by providing technical and creative support and a venue for distribution, while we tried to ensure that storytellers were more than mere screenwriters or actors, but actually assumed the role of hands on directors of their stories. We maintained flexibility and a willingness to improvise at every step of the production process, accommodating storytellers' desires to edit or even recast their stories not only during the creation process, but at all stages of production, including the latter ones. Not limited by time restraints that might be imposed through a community workshop format, storytellers were able to manage the pace of the creation process according to their own schedules and preferences.

However, we did not by any means remain off in the distance during the creation process. A non-interventionist approach seemed to contradict our understanding of ethics as reciprocal as we wanted to embrace our role and make it visible. Thus, from our very first meetings with potential storytellers, as they came to understand what the genre was, and how they wanted to make use of it to contribute to the very roughly articulated parameters of our project, we began to follow their lead in negotiating what their and our roles would be in the creation and production of their stories—and even in the selection of images (to avoid copyright infringement). For example, while some storytellers knew from the beginning exactly what stories they wanted to tell, others looked to us for help in deciding which of many possible stories they would tell. It can by no means be assumed that a single storyteller has only one story to tell; in some cases, the issue was how to choose that one story, while in others it was more a matter of helping storytellers think about how to incorporate multiple elements that they considered essential into a single story, even when it meant complicating their story more than might be ideal for the genre. We were also called upon to help storytellers avoid digressions that they could not help recounting as the storytelling process is often a soul-searching endeavor, a means of

consolidation of identity and self-understanding.

It was important for us to become aware of how community partners were most comfortable telling stories. We kept our training in digital storytelling in mind, but were always ready to improvise in accordance with the circumstances at hand. Tania Solorio, one of our storytellers, quickly produced a written story. Another was hesitant to write, but instead recorded her draft story orally onto her telephone, then asked us to transcribe it for her. In another case, the storyteller needed us to take notes as she orally worked through the content of her story.

Community partners also handled the visual element of digital storytelling in different ways. Some were easily able to visualize the story they wanted to tell, and had many ideas regarding images that would accompany their narratives. Others were more passive or less naturally creative in this area. One storyteller, who was deeply comfortable writing narrative but not working with images, provided only a few photographs, preferring that we be the ones to draft the visual track of his story, for his subsequent comments and ultimate approval. While we reinforced that storytellers had the ultimate authority over the use of visual materials, we were ready to contribute our ideas whenever we were asked to do so.

Furthermore, we often served as a sounding board for ideas, and acted as archivists of discussions, an important function in some cases due to the complicated nature of the storytellers' work or personal or family lives, which often required breaks of several weeks or even longer between meetings. Storytellers often sought out our opinions about their ideas; this was tricky as they inevitably saw us as university professors and graduate students, as authorities whose opinions carried significant weight. We were afraid that any negative reaction on our part might end up functioning as an effective veto. As we accepted the impossibility of a completely horizontal relationship, we embraced a version of ethics in which we recognized the tensions and challenges of collaborating. There were also cases where our community collaborators felt so strongly about their ideas that they had the confidence to override our opinions. In addition, it was clear at many moments that storytellers felt affirmed upon obtaining our approval, and that our relationship — and our position of authority— fueled their creativity. It was crucial for us to constantly think about questions of attention, care, respect, and appreciation in our dealings with our storytelling partners.

Ultimately, the creative process ended up being deeply collaborative. However, we also believe that our storytellers truly feel that they are the authors of their stories—and we feel that they are, as well. What we have learned from our process is that in order for digital storytelling to work in a way that empowers community members to tell their own stories, and thereby assure a significant degree of authenticity in their content, a deep—and in many ways hands on—but very carefully managed collaboration on the part of facilitating partners is essential.

Performance

The dissemination potential for *Sexualidades Campesinas* transcends the academic audience that we, its facilitators, know best. The stories' digital quality creates the possibility for sharing them outside traditional networks of research circulation (conferences, articles protected by paywalls, publications not easily accessible to readers due to use of academic jargon), and their audiovisual format makes them accessible to many who might not engage as readily with print culture. Challenging the written word as the conventional language of research, performance theory, and research methods is especially relevant. The notion of performance helps us understand an embodied research model that only exists in the doing, in our interaction and collaboration with

storytellers. It allows us to embrace the lack of precision and objectivity, and the role of embodied documentation of our process. More importantly, it keeps us critical about the dangers of visibility and reproducibility.

Following Diana Taylor, we understand performance as an object of study, a research process and an epistemology:

> Performance, on one level, constitutes the object/process of analysis in performance studies, that is the many practices and events–dance, theatre, ritual, political rallies, funerals–that involve theatrical, rehearsed, or conventional/event-appropriate behaviors[…] On another level, performance also constitutes the methodological lens that enables scholars to analyze events *as* performance. Civic disobedience, resistance, citizenship, gender, ethnicity, and sexual identity, for example, are rehearsed and performed daily in the public sphere.[26]

Performance theory helps us understand our digital storytelling project by leading us to pay attention to the practices and events that are part of its realization: finding participants, developing trust, creating collaboratively, using technology, editing. In doing so, we privilege the role of embodiment in knowledge production. Thinking about the research process and our roles as researchers as examples of an embodied practice informed by rehearsal and improvisation, brings to the fore knowledge that is experiential and transmitted by "being there."

Despite the apparent divide between performance (embodied) and the digital (disembodied), we turn to the notion of performance in order to locate our project within a framework in which we pay as much attention to process as to outcome. What this means is that we recognize that our goals in researching farm working communities cannot be separated from colonial power relations that have been historically reproduced by academic research. Indigenous methodologies demonstrate the connections between academic production of knowledge and strengthening of racialized hierarchies that support marginalization and oppression.[27] The coloniality of power[28] has not only affected the binary interaction between researchers and researched, but it has reinforced writing as the center of knowledge production, not surprisingly excluding the researched from participating in the production and consumption of research outcomes. Recognizing embodied practices as knowledge, and interacting with storytellers for extended periods of time, motivates interaction that is itself performative and that occurs before and outside writing.

Following the "practice turn," our project uses performance as part of a process of knowledge production that expands what is valuable and who gets to participate in research. As Shannon Rose Riley and Lynette Hunter remind us,

> [w]hile performance practices have always contributed to knowledge, the idea that performance can be more than creative production, that it can constitute intellectual inquiry and contribute new understanding and insight is a concept that challenges many institutional structures and calls into question what gets valued as knowledge. Perhaps the most singular contribution of the developing areas of practice as research (PaR) and performance as research (PAR) is the claim that creative production can constitute intellectual inquiry.[29]

Digital storytelling can be read as an example of the qualitative research model that PaR and PAR promote. As a collaborative and embodied method, it requires a specific theatrical kind of storytelling that is both framed by the limits of the genre and shaped by the roles and desires of the participants. Its practice is embodied and constituted by the

rehearsal of specific roles (e.g. facilitator, storyteller) and, most especially in our idiosyncratic one-on-one production method, requires improvisation to negotiate the specifics of every story with its storyteller. Accordingly, the decisions made to create each story collaboratively show that identity and self-representation are also daily performances. As Sonja Vivienne and Jean Burgess state, "[u]nlike face-to-face performances of identity, digital stories offer the opportunity for a refined, reflective articulation of self."[30] Every digital story is a shaped representation of narrative, images, audio, and events that were carefully selected by our storytellers, in collaboration with the team members, to present their life stories and identities for public consumption. In this way, decisions about selection and editing are also performative, and create the identities and stories themselves.

As researchers, our performance is informed by our expectations during our encounters with storytellers. As organic as every interaction with our collaborators has been, every meeting is a mix between familiarity and productivity. Our role is always to recall, to organize, to moderate, and to advance, even when the mood is festive and relaxed. Improvisation and rehearsal make up our default modus operandi, due to each interaction with a storyteller being different and irreproducible, but the performance of our roles is informed by a never fixed hierarchy that is, nonetheless, visible and tangible. Our digital storytelling project functions as a scripted performance that allows flexibility within the limits of our roles.

Through rehearsal and improvisation, staging—something we'd never thought about or planned—became part of our process. One storyteller, Tania Solorio, selected pictures from family albums, old home movies, social media, and selfies from her cellphone for her story, "My Perfect Family," and she suggested re-enacting some events through audio and still images. The reappropriation of her past performs a last piece of the healing process she articulates in her story, and the story constitutes a place of articulation and potential engagement with its audience.

In other stories, performance took the shape of change. In "Metamorphosis," a story about a transition to femininity embodies change as storytelling, as hormone-therapy replacement took place during the process of the story production. As embodiment of change, this storyteller decided to perform change in her storytelling by publicly sharing her experience and using the explicit metaphor of a butterfly to describe her journey. Embodiment became storytelling as she decided to organize her images chronologically to reflect her transition. At the same time, her story and her interactions with team members reflect a conscious performance of femininity: from the tone of her voice to the feminine aesthetics of the images selected for her story. The performative character of this story reifies her femininity and identity.

For storytellers that are used to performing as part of their professional practice, such as Rigoberto González, a former farmworker who is nowadays a college professor and award winning writer, the story is shaped by the specific skills that inform their practice. His story, for example, reflects a vocal delivery based on his expertise in public readings. His knowledge is an embodied practice that informs the use of his declamation skills as his story's main strategy to connect his writing with an audience that can identify with his life experiences. By focusing on the aural performance, his story decenters the visual as the most representative aspect of digital storytelling. His decision to create a longer story reflects his interest in telling his story without the constraints of length that digital storytelling imposes, as well as a non-hierarchical engagement with the project.

Some of our storytellers are, despite a lack of professional experience, talented entertainers. María Cárdenas's way of being is an energetic performance that reflects her

personality and wit. She sings, tells stories, and is playful with her family and anyone who interacts with her. She is comfortable in front of strangers and tells her story in different venues but always with the same energy, opening space for difficult conversations about sexuality and identity. Her ingrained acting skills made it easy for her to perform and improvise for the camera. Her story "Man, Woman or Fish" reflects both spontaneous play and theatrical doing that recognizes the public character of her performance. Her first audio take was the one she wanted to use, with minimal editing required. Her story used performance as a tool to reach to people that might be experiencing the confusion of questioning their sexual identity. Performance reveals that public storytelling involves the staging of aesthetic elements as a reflection of the storyteller. The selection of images and words is a negotiation process that is performative as it creates a self-representation.

As we have seen, both the process and the outcomes of digital storytelling create visibility for the priorities established in this negotiation process by the storyteller and the facilitators. But as our project's goal is to make visible the struggles of members of farm working communities, thinking about performance as what exceeds reproduction and escapes the finished products brings to our attention all the embodied knowledge that we have not encountered and remains invisible. As Peggy Phelan affirms, visibility does not equal power: "Visibility and invisibility are crucially bound; invisibility polices visibility and in this specific sense functions as the ascendant term in the binary. Gaining visibility for the politically under-represented without scrutinizing the power of who is required to display what to whom is an impoverished political agenda."[31] Visibility also contributes to our ethical understanding of the process, as being visible creates the potential for political representation but does not erase marginalization.

Mediation

Mediation is an inherent aspect of communication. Every time a message is exchanged, its signs acquire different meanings according to the socio-cultural intricacies of the context in which it is transmitted. Moreover, its meanings are shaped by the intentions, worldviews, and sociocultural orientations of its receptor and emitter. Conventionally, the definition of mediation has stemmed from theoretical debates in semiotics. However, mediation within the practice and theory of digital storytelling—or in any context in which a third party (in this case, the facilitator) or technology itself plays a key role in enabling communication—exceeds the context of the mere speech act or direct and straightforward act of transmission of signs. Mediation is a reminder of difference and the importance of imagining otherwise before we are able to create a political intervention.

Mediation may of course refer to a form of negotiation of meaning and power between agents, contexts and forms of communication. Because of the multimodal aspects of digital storytelling, mediation frequently occurs during the production, dissemination, and remote reception of digital stories.[32] In a mediated space, such as that of digital storytelling, it is imperative to recognize the pivotal role of power structures within personal and interpersonal dynamics, the goal of "authenticity" in the genre of digital storytelling, the implications of the use of digital media, and the potentiality of social relations that can be established through digital narratives.

The most obvious mediation that occurs in digital storytelling is that of the facilitator, the one who has the expertise and resources to assist a storyteller in crafting, recording, producing, editing, and ultimately disseminating a digital story. In addition, the technologies of production and diffusion themselves act as mediators between storyteller and audience.

These mediations are not unidirectional. Indeed, media representations of personal experience carry a symbolic charge that may potentially transform the way in which

storytellers perceive themselves. This dialectic between personal life experience and digital media complicates the communication process as the initial meanings imagined by the storyteller at the beginning of the creation and production process cannot be assumed to be stable. According to Ola Erstad and James Wertsch:

> [a]ny form of mediation involves some form of limitation […] The important point here, and again, a point that is often missed in sociological or psychological studies, is that when a new tool, a new medium is introduced into the flow of action, it does not simply facilitate or make an existing form of action more efficient. The emphasis is in how it transforms the form of action, on the qualitative transformative, as opposed to facilitative, role of cultural tools.[33]

This "qualitative transformative role" of digital storytelling also speaks to the issue of access to the public sphere. Following Erstad and Wertsch, digital storytelling elevates oral culture, situating storytellers in a place of empowerment and thereby reframing subjectivity.

One of the first experiences of mediation in digital storytelling occurs when the storyteller faces the question about what story to tell. This introspection in the act of searching for a defining life experience poses challenges to the storyteller: what to recount? why recount it? and how to recount it? Storytellers mediate the content, form, and representation of the narrative that is significantly meaningful to them, bringing to the surface questions of inner versus public identity. Within the margins of our project on digital narratives from sexually diverse migrant farm workers, the power of the medium transforms the story that gets told and, to some extent, may transform identity. Identity becomes a site of mediation in that the assemblage of selfhood, as part of the process of storytelling, brings the storyteller to become aware of life's contradictions and complexities. This fragmentation of identity categories highlights the "multivoicedness" of digital narratives, alluding to the intersectionality and instability of identity (e.g. lesbian/farmworker/mother/Mexican immigrant).

We chose to work with digital storytelling because we believed that it would allow collaborators with little if any means of making their personal stories public to tell their stories without significant interventions from our research team as their mediators. However, as discussed above, it soon became clear to us that neither we as facilitators nor the technologies we introduced could be employed in such a way as to erase our roles. All we could do to shape our ethical process was to accept that we would be mediators, and do our best to deploy our mediations in as self-conscious and collaborative a way as possible, so that the storytellers with whom we worked could use both human and technological facilitators to their best advantage.

However, we admit that our role loomed large. Regardless of the bonding that we achieved with storytellers, we remained representatives of an institution of higher education. While we conformed to the schedules and energy levels of the storytellers, they also conformed to ours, with our own work demands, travel plans, and personal activities asserting themselves right along with those of the storytellers.

And while the technologies we used to record, edit, produce, and eventually post our digital stories on the internet were all meant to facilitate and not mediate, these technologies likewise asserted themselves frequently, imposing screen resolutions, sound quality, screen shape, and various stylistic details on the stories.

A final mediating factor was that of language itself. Like everyday life for most California farmworkers, our digital story project was conceived as bilingual. Some storytellers were native Spanish speakers; others were native English speakers; all were bilingual.

Considering both how they preferred to express themselves and how they preferred to present themselves to their imagined audiences, storytellers chose to speak in English or Spanish (with subtitles added in the other language). Language in the context of bilingual California is also a site for mediation. Issues of word choice, register, code switching, idiomatic expressions, inflection, and other aspects of orality all mediate differently across the two languages, particularly when one is spoken and the other appears written across the screen. The practices of translation and subtitling in the editing process also became a common mediated space in which selecting a language of speech was influenced by the imagined audience of each storyteller.

Conclusion

In the end, mediating our affective bonds with our storytelling collaborators and performing our roles as facilitators guided our ethical concerns to minimize unwanted interventions and kept our roles subordinate to those of the storytellers themselves in the crafting and production of their stories. We recognize that it would have been foolish to imagine that we could somehow set things up so that our narrators could truly produce their digital stories on their own, without our inevitable mediations making an impact on them. So rather than strive to erase ourselves, we aimed to carry out a meticulously careful collaboration that helped to construct and ultimately maintain the authority and ownership of the storyteller author-directors in their production.

It was our particular reformulation of the digital storytelling production method that led us to focus so intently on our roles. No longer mere leaders of workshops in which multiple voices of pre-articulated communities were the majority, our personalized production process drew attention to our performances, our strategies for bonding with our collaborators, our mediations (and those of the technologies we offered), the instability of the notion of community, and, most especially, the importance of a constant attention to an ethics of collaboration.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to our colleagues Jesikah Maria Ross, Juan Poblete, Alejandro Rossi, Carmen Valdivia Ponce and to our community collaborators María Cárdenas, Tania Solorio, Mayra Castellanos, Carina López, Rigoberto González, and Valentín Sierra for their valuable input both on the project itself and on the questions of ethics we are considering here. We are also indebted to Cal Humanities, the University of California's California Studies Consortium, and UC-MEXUS for providing funding for this project. Finally, we are especially indebted to Cathy Hannabach for the feedback she gave us on an earlier draft of this essay.

Notes

1. See Catherine Coleborn and Elaine Bliss, "Emotions, Digital Tools and Public Histories: Digital Storytelling using Windows Movie Maker in the History Tertiary Classroom," *History Compass* 9, no. 9 (2011): 674–85; Patrick Lowenthal, "Digital Storytelling in Education: An Emerging Institutional Technology?" in John Hartley and Kelly McWilliam, eds., *Story Circle: Digital Storytelling Around the World* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 252–9.
2. We were trained in Digital Storytelling following the StoryCenter method, which we then adapted for the context of our project.
3. Although we shared our plans of writing and publishing about the project, we decided not to invite our collaborators as coauthors. All mentions of the project storytellers and the storytelling process are based on our fieldnotes, memories, and

close readings of the stories and the process.

4. See Guillermo Nuñez Noriega, *Just Between Us: An Ethnography of Male Identity and Intimacy in Rural Communities of Northern Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014); Robert McKee Irwin, *Mexican Masculinities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Lionel Cantú, *The Sexuality of Migration: Border Crossings and Mexican Immigrant Men* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Karma Chávez, "Identifying the Needs of LGBTQ Immigrants and Refugees in Southern Arizona," *Journal of Homosexuality* 58, no. 2 (2011): 189–218; Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); and Raúl Balbuena Bello, *Gays en el desierto: Paradojas de la manifestación pública en Mexicali* (Mexicali: UABC, Mantarraya Ediciones, 2015).
5. Jean Burgess, "Hearing Ordinary Voices: Cultural Studies, Vernacular Creativity and Digital Storytelling," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 20, no. 2 (2006): 201.
6. Nick Couldry, "Digital Storytelling, Media Research and Democracy," in *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories: Self-Representations in New Media*, ed. Knut Lundby (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 54.
7. Joe Lambert, *Digital Storytelling: Capturing lives, Creating Community* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 1.
8. Lara Worcester, "Reframing Digital Storytelling as Co-creative," *IDS Bulletin* 43, no. 5 (2012): 91.
9. Worcester, "Reframing Digital Storytelling," 92.
10. Aline Gubrium, Amy Hill, and Sarah Flicker, for example, interrogate issues around the "fuzzy boundaries" around research and advocacy, recruitment and consent procedures, the power of shaping digital stories, potential harm to storytellers, confidentiality, and the (public) release of materials. See "A Situated Practice of Ethics for Participatory Visual and Digital Methods in Public Health Research and Practice: A Focus on Digital Storytelling," *American Journal of Public Health* 104, no. 9 (September 2014): 1606–14.
11. Gubrium, Hill, and Flicker, "A Situated Practice of Ethics," 1610.
12. Mexico City legalized changes to legal gender and name for transgender people in 2008, and same-sex marriage and adoption in 2009, but the rest of the country is still slowly catching up, with states like Yucatán banning same-sex marriage in 2009. Intolerance and violence against the LGBTQI community are still present.
13. See, for example, the StoryCenter's *Silence Speaks Projects*. One of these projects worked with indigenous groups in the Rift Valley of Africa, Central Asia, and Northwestern Mexico, aiming to "enable participants to continue documenting stories within their *communities*" (http://www.storycenter.org/case-studies/christensen, emphasis ours). More locally, in Northern California, a UC Davis-based digital storytelling project titled *A Passion for the Land* worked with local "*community* partners," on a project designed to "produce and present digital stories on current challenges to agricultural viability and rural *community* life in the Sierra Valley" (http://artofregionalchange.ucdavis.edu/?page_id=49, emphasis ours). In addition, Joe Lambert's book is subtitled "creating lives, creating *community*" (emphasis ours). Community is a key concept underlying a substantial proportion of digital storytelling projects.
14. See Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.)
15. See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.)
16. See J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural*

Lives (New York: NYU Press, 2005); Roderick Ferguson, "Sissies at the Picnic: The Subjugated History of a Black Rural Queer" in *Feminist Waves, Feminist Generations: Life Stories of Three Generations in the Academy*, eds. Hokulani Aikau, Karl Erickson, and Jennifer Pierce (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Scott Herring, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (New York: NYU Press, 2010); Jessica Jones, "Spatializing Sexuality in Jaime Hernandez's Locas," *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies* 30, no. 1 (2009): 35–64; Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

17. Burgess, "Hearing Ordinary Voices," 210.
18. Lambert, *Digital Storytelling*, 23.
19. Lambert, *Digital Storytelling*, 23.
20. Geraldine Bloustien, "Play, Affect, and Participatory Video as a Reflexive Research Strategy," in *Handbook of Participatory Video*, ed. E-J Milne et al. (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2012), 125.
21. Veena Das, "Ordinary Ethics," in *A Companion to Moral Anthropology*, ed. Didier Fassin. (Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 142.
22. Lambert, *Digital Storytelling,* 15.
23. Lambert, *Digital Storytelling,* 19–22.
24. Lambert, *Digital Storytelling,* 53–69.
25. Lambert, *Digital Storytelling,* 77.
26. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 3.
27. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 2012).
28. Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from the South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–80.
29. Shannon Rose Riley and Lynette Hunter, eds., *Mapping Landscapes for Performance as Research: Scholarly Arts and Creative Cartographies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), xv.
30. Sonja Vivienne and Jean Burgess. "The Digital Storyteller's Stage: Queer Everyday Activists Negotiating Privacy and Publicness," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 56, no. 3 (2012): 374.
31. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 26.
32. Birgit Hertzberg Kaare and Knut Lundby, "Mediatized Lives: Autobiography and Assumed Authenticity in Digital Storytelling," in *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories: Self-Representations in New Media,* ed. Knut Lundby (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 107.
33. Ola Erstad and James Wertsch, "Tales of Mediation: Narrative and Digital Media as Cultural Tools," in *Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories: Self-Representations in New Media*, ed. Knut Lundby (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 27.

Bio

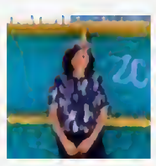


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Bio



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Bio



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Bio



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Bio



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Forum: Emergent Critical Analytics for Alternative Humanities
Issue 6.1 (Spring 2017)

Toward Alternative Humanities and Insurgent Collectivities

Chris A Eng and Amy K King

ABSTRACT Introduction to Part II of the forum, Emergent Critical Analytics for Alternative Humanities. Here, emergent scholars respond to essays by J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, Kyla Wazana Tompkins, Julie Avril Minich, and Jodi Melamed, each of whom elaborated on the alternative possibilities of dealing with the legacies of settler colonialism, new materialisms, disability, and institutionality in Part I, published in Lateral 5.1.

> "Otherwise, who crawls into the place of the 'human' of 'humanism' at the end of the day, even in the name of diversity? We must consider 'collectivities.'"
>
> —Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*.[1]

What is the role of the Humanities in our contemporary moment? How can we engage in modes of scholarly practices and critical analytics anew in order to best respond to our political exigencies in ways that simultaneously attend to the forces shaping the historical present while imagining a more just future? These questions guided the early conversations for this two-part forum, which began in preparation for the 2014 American Studies Association annual conference in Los Angeles. As members of the Students' Committee, we collectively contemplated the conference theme's prompt for conjoining "the fun and the fury" in our theorizing, organizing, and teaching. In collaboration, we considered the necessity of such a call during a moment when rhetoric and actions that ostensibly champion victories in progress, rights, and freedom increasingly worked to obfuscate and rationalize sustained forms of systemic violence. Critical conversations taking place across the interdisciplinary fields of cultural studies, American studies, and critical ethnic studies interrogated the practices by which conventional terms of Humanism invoked by the university, "in the name of diversity," served as an alibi that inhibited the possibility for structural change and emancipatory futures. For us, the scholar-activist-teachers across these fields enacted and gestured toward the potential for insurgent collectives that craft alternative humanities, in dissent and in conviviality, toward demands for materializing social justice.

As a way of animating and resounding these lines of thought, we organized a roundtable wherein established scholars followed the model of the "keywords" project, pioneered by cultural studies scholars. The roundtable participants outlined some of the possibilities, limitations, and ongoing projects associated with what we observed as four emergent critical analytics: settler colonialism, new materialisms, disability, and institutionality. The roundtable session was well attended and sparked a lively dialogue between the panelists and junior scholars in the audience, which compelled us to extend the conversations further. From the start, we wanted to offer a venue to facilitate a call-and-response between established and emergent scholar-activist-teachers, the type of conversation

that would cross disciplinary boundaries, subvert entrenched mentoring practices in academia, and provide access to a wide audience beyond the traditional printed format. This journal afforded us the platform for staging such lateral encounters between and across conventional boundaries while resonating with our convictions about culture as a complex site for materialist critique that can allow us to envision otherwise.

This two-part forum thus serves as a modest point of departure for considering alternative models of collaborative thinking and strategizing in the academy, the classroom, and beyond. In Part I of the forum, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, Kyla Wazana Tompkins, Julie Avril Minich, and Jodi Melamed each elaborated on the alternative possibilities of dealing with the legacies of settler colonialism, new materialisms, disability, and institutionality. Their remarks prompted us to re-formulate these keywords as emergent critical analytics in order to nuance their contradictory uses and effects, as the introduction to Part I of the forum contemplates. Made clear throughout their comments was how they imagine alternatives to the humanities as practice, placing the intersectional experiences of people's lived materialities at the center of their scholarship and classrooms. In Part II of this forum, emergent scholars take up the call in Part I, and we are humbled by the warm response to our call. Here, we are excited to feature the intellectual work by the following emerging scholars in this part of the forum: Tanja Aho, Melissa Gniadek, Michelle N. Huang, Beenash Jafri, Jina B. Kim, Sami Schalk, Chad Shomura, and Leland Tabares. Writing in collaboration and with critical generosity, Kauanui, Tompkins, Minich, and Melamed then synthesize these responses and offer further thoughts. Read together, Parts I and II of the forum signal the importance of visible, ongoing discussions that expand beyond temporal, national, and disciplinary bounds.

The prompt for imagining alternative humanities and different scholarly and pedagogical models seems more urgent than ever in this political climate: as funding to education and the humanities are increasingly under attack; as the current administration sanctions xenophobia, white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, ableism, militarism, and antiblackness under the consolidation of white nationalism. The election of Trump radically troubles celebrations of American exceptionalism, instead illuminating the ascendance of Far Right politics globally. These conditions ground the stakes of our work and the terms by which contributors to this forum offer their thoughts on attending to the critical potential of these analytics. Responding to Kauanui's meditation on Patrick Wolfe's theorization (seeing settler colonialism as "a structure, not an event"), Melissa Gniadek and Beenash Jafri show how considering the multiple and intersecting temporalities of colonial violence has shaped their roles as scholar-activists. Gniadek approaches settler colonialism via questions of time—asking "When is settler colonialism?"—which reveals how narratives of national belonging tend to operate, as "narrative confrontations" that facilitate violence throughout and across time. Jafri articulates how a critical race feminist/queer lens makes possible thinking that sees the repetitions of racialized, gendered, sexualized colonial violence. Both Gniadek and Jafri refocus the work of scholars so they are not continuously defining/defending their terminology ("settler colonialism"), but rather taking on the roles of scholar-activists, confronting intersecting violence directly while centering Indigenous peoples in this work. Chad Shomura and Michelle N. Huang likewise further contemplate the "limits and promise of new materialist philosophy" that Tompkins delineated. Both essays further nuance what Tompkins evinced as the lack of engagement with questions of race, difference, and the biopolitical as schools of new materialist thought turned toward the ontological, the nonhuman, and the posthuman. Attending to this dynamic, Shomura mediates upon the promise and possibilities that new materialisms affords in its attentiveness to the material. Meanwhile, Huang reassesses the methodological implications of new

materialisms by grappling with renewed attention to form in literary studies to articulate the varying processes by which racial difference becomes elided, rematerialized, and remade. In so doing, both Shomura and Huang identify multiple counter-currents within this growing field to apprehend the ways in which alternative ontologies may open up new understandings of the biopolitical and other avenues for critique.

Scholar-activist-teachers Jina B. Kim and Sami Schalk take up Minich's call to approach disability as methodology, one that decenters the intertwined dominant positions of whiteness and ability (Kim) and focuses on social structures, which Schalk visually signals with the punctuation of the term *(dis)ability*. In so doing, Kim and Schalk elaborate upon a crip-of-color lens, through which they see the possibilities to both question structures that inherently devalue humans and to take action to work toward justice. Both Kim and Schalk call for a shift in thinking that directly affects action. Schalk creates classroom experiences that help students to critique intersecting social structures in their everyday encounters, and Kim recognizes that these structures extend to educational institutions themselves. Kim's final call is to identify and act against the inequalities and harm of academic labor, urging readers to take seriously a "politics of refusal" that might help academics of color survive through alternative collectivities.

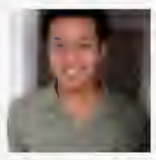
Continuing to interrogate institutions, Tanja Aho and Leland Tabares take up Melamed's task in problematizing certain common strands of theorizing institutionality while imagining what else might be possible. Aho pointedly argues that studies of institutionality all too often substantiate what she calls "neoliberalocentrism," which readily posits neoliberalism as *the* singular paradigm for narrating a teleological development of history. Instead, she echoes Kim and Schalk to articulate "crip-of-color materialism" as an analytic that thickens understandings about global structures of inequity and fissures within them. Alongside Aho, Tabares invites us to question the role of what he calls "para-institutions," such as corporations, in shaping and influencing the logics and investments within the university. As a counterpoint to these processes, he ponders the possibilities of seizing upon the elements of proceduralism in mobilizing forms of collectivity that can span across institutional contexts outside the academy.

By drawing our attention to the structures within which we produce our scholarship, Parts I and II of this forum take up the task of reconsidering the present of the "Humanities" and what it means to be "human." As our contributors illustrate, when we engage in dialogues across disciplines, across spaces, and across temporalities, we speak to and against the institutionalized ideas of diversity, relevance, value, outcomes, and civility. Together, we might read these conversations and collaborations to envision and enact modes of insurgent collectivities that work within and beyond the academy—within and beyond the radical uncertainties of our here and now.

Notes

1. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 23.

Bio

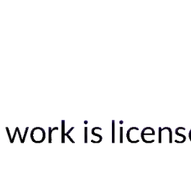


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Bio



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Settler Colonialism

Ongoing Colonial Violence in Settler States

Beenash Jafri

ABSTRACT Response to J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, "A Structure, Not an Event: Settler Colonialism and Enduring Indigeneity," published in Lateral 5.1. Jafri articulates how a critical race feminist/queer lens makes possible thinking that sees the repetitions of racialized, gendered, sexualized colonial violence.

In this post, I extend J. Kēhaulani Kauanui's incisive *Lateral* essay on the analytic of settler colonialism. Kauanui's discussion underscores implications of understanding settler colonialism as a structure, rather than an event, while insisting on the centrality of indigeneity to discussions of settler colonialism.[1] In line with that discussion, I reflect here on my own introduction to, and relationship with, settler colonial studies, offering an alternate trajectory and context for this work that makes visible some of the distinct stakes for those of us who are engaged in queer/feminist of color and decolonizing research and activism. I outline some of the distinctions between early work on ongoing colonialism by critical race and Native feminist scholars that preceded the institutionalized formation of settler colonial studies, while also distinguishing both of these from the approaches found in Indigenous Studies. For fellow scholars engaged in settler colonial studies, I emphasize the significance of developing scholarship that is invested in addressing entangled forms of racialized and colonial violence, rather than reproducing fields or disciplines.

When I began a project on coalition building between Indigenous peoples and people of color as an MA student in Canada in 2005, "settler colonial studies" was not yet established as a field. However, I was able to draw on the work of scholars such as Bonita Lawrence, Enakshi Dua, Sherene Razack, Patricia Monture and Lee Maracle to speak of ongoing colonial violence in white settler societies. Maracle's *I Am Woman* develops an early Native feminist framework through an account of everyday colonialism and its gendered intersections; Monture's *Journeying Forward* presents a critique of the notion of self-determination, arguing instead for the independence of First Nations; Lawrence's *Real Indian and Others* situates the tensions surrounding "mixed-blood" Natives in terms of the Canadian Indian Act, which regulates Indigenous identity and access to treaty rights; Lawrence's highly provocative essay, co-written with Enakshi Dua, "Decolonizing Antiracism," argues that theories of race, diaspora, and postcoloniality, along with antiracism activism, reproduce the colonial discourses and ideologies of settler states; Razack's edited collection, *Race, Space and the Law* draws on critical race and gender studies to examine the spatial violence of white settler societies.[2] Maracle and Monture do not use the language of "settlers," "settler-colonials," or "settler state." Razack, Lawrence, and Dua use these terms primarily to describe the patterns of capitalist development that are particular to the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand: White settlement of these lands required the erasure and displacement of Indigenous peoples

and claims to land, and the exploitation of labor of people of color to develop that land.[3] Though Lawrence, Dua, and Razack respectively speak of colonization as being upheld and supported by settler states, they also implicitly make a subtle distinction between the settler state and colonization: the settler state had colonizing imperatives that were historically and geographically specific—because colonization facilitated settlement—but those colonizing imperatives were not necessarily identified as a unique form of colonization. Take, for example, Razack's definition of a white settler society, from the introduction to her 2002 edited collection, *Race, Space, and the Law:*

> A white settler society is one established by Europeans on non-European soil. Its origins lie in the dispossession and near extermination of Indigenous populations by the conquering Europeans. As it evolves, a white settler society continues to be structured by a racial hierarchy. In the national mythologies of such societies, it is believed that white people came first and that it is they who principally developed the land; Aboriginal peoples are presumed to be mostly dead or assimilated. European settlers thus *become* the original inhabitants and the group most entitled to the fruits of citizenship. A quintessential feature of white settler mythologies is, therefore, the disavowal of conquest, genocide, slavery, and the exploitation of the labour of peoples of colour. In North America, it is still the case that European conquest and colonization are often denied, largely through the fantasy that North America was peacefully settled and not colonized.[4]

Though her definition flattens some of the distinct histories of the US and Canada—including the differences in nation and state formation resulting from an economy organized through chattel slavery in the US—Razack importantly centralizes the violence of conquest, and its subsequent disavowals, in this definition of a white settler society. For her, what characterizes this society is not that colonialism is "a structure, not an event,"[5] but that colonialism is the continued repetition of colonial violence, or of the colonizer/colonized relationship. In the same edited collection, Razack's essay on the murder of Saulteaux woman Pamela George exemplifies this approach as she argues how both the murder and subsequent trial discursively and materially repeated and affirmed colonial violence.[6]

When settler colonial studies became institutionalized through Lorenzo Veracini's introductory text, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (2010), and the inaugural issue of *Settler Colonial Studies* (2011), I simultaneously excited at the generative possibilities this work opened up for supporting the work I was already doing, and perplexed by the "newness" and seemingly sudden declarations of the contours of the field, given that my primary points of engagement were located in critical race and Indigenous Studies.[7] I had begun this work with a clear premise: that colonization is ongoing. Subsequently, the questions framing my work included: What does ongoing colonization look like? How does it manifest? How do particular institutions, discourses, ideologies, and groups perpetuate colonization? This was a very different project than, say, describing what settler colonialism looked like. The starting point was that the violence affecting Indigenous peoples was historically constituted and perpetuated by legal and cultural discourses. The intellectual, political, and ethical commitments were to confront that violence, rather than to better understand settler colonialism per se. At the same time, the establishment of settler colonial studies also meant that I could spend less time "proving" that colonization was happening in settler states, because the field created a framework that clearly laid out its parameters. In particular, Patrick Wolfe's conceptualization of settler colonialism as "a structure, not an event" premised on "the elimination of the Native" enabled me to support the contention that colonization is ongoing.[8]

Retrospectively, however, I believe there is a qualitative difference between arguing that colonization is ongoing, and arguing that colonization is a structure, even as the two may be intertwined. The former gestures to repetition of an originary violence, emphasizing the continual reenactment of colonization, whereas the latter emphasizes the totalizing effects of originary violence, emphasizing colonization's erasures. To be sure, remembrance and erasure have a dialectical relationship with one another. Yet, there are political-ethical implications to highlighting one over the other. For example, engaging colonization as ongoing generates possibilities for focusing on colonial violence and its intersectional entanglements with racialized, gendered, and sexualized exclusion and exploitation, as exemplified by scholars working on settler colonialism through the lenses of women of color feminism, black feminism, queer of color critique, and critical race and ethnic studies.[9] In particular, underscoring the repetition of colonial violence enables (even if it does not guarantee) the centering of Indigenous peoples—who are still here, and still resisting colonialism—while drawing attention to *experiences* of violence and their embodiment through categories of difference such as race, gender, and sexuality, as well as their connections to land. To return to Razack—her analysis of the Pamela George case elucidates that colonial violence in settler societies happens again and again, with the support of social institutions and discourses. Framing that violence as an intrinsic or established feature of settler societies implies that it has been embedded in a structure that simply replicates itself. Razack's framing suggests that the violence is active and dynamic—allowing for the possibility of intervention and transformation—whereas framing colonial violence as an intrinsic component of settler societies suggests that the violence is *always already there*, thus limiting, even if not foreclosing, transformative possibilities. I think here too of Tiffany King's essay "New World Grammars" (2016), which emphasizes colonialism as *conquest* rather than as settled structure in order to foreground the encounters with violence that subsequently form the basis for Black and Native relationality.[10] King's essay is included in the Fall 2016 *Theory and Event* special issue "On Colonial Unknowing," edited by Manu Vimalassery, Juliana Hu Pegues, and Alyosha Goldstein, which insists on the indispensability of "postcolonial feminist theory, critical disability studies, queer theory, and women of color feminism" for undoing the disavowal of colonial relations that characterizes white settler societies.[11] In their introduction to the special issue, Vimalassery, Pegues, and Goldstein posit that the over-emphasis on settler colonialism as structure unwittingly obscures settler colonialism's historicity, or the ways in which it operates and has operated as event, and in conjunction with other modes of power.[12]

At the same time, both settler colonial studies and critical race feminist/queer approaches are "top down" insofar as they take as their point of departure colonizers/colonial violence. This is markedly different from Indigenous Studies approaches, which investigate how Indigenous peoples negotiate, contest, and resist colonial power. For instance, two recent, major works in the field, Audra Simpson's *Mohawk Interruptus* and Glen Coulthard's *Red Skin, White Masks,* have as their core focus Indigenous expressions of sovereignty and decolonization in settler colonial contexts.[13] As Kauanui makes clear in her *Lateral* essay, "any meaningful engagement with theories of settler colonialism—whether Wolfe's or others'—necessarily needs to tend to the question of indigeneity. Settler Colonial Studies does not, should not, and cannot replace Indigenous Studies."[14] While both settler colonial studies and critical race feminist/queer approaches offer generative insights into the workings of colonial power, those of us working from these approaches need to be mindful of these distinctions and how they position us differently with respect to questions of decolonization. Investigations of settler colonialism may inadvertently center non-Natives and reproduce colonial violence if not attentive to Indigenous voices, struggles, and perspectives. Professional academic expectations that

prioritize the reproduction of disciplinary (or interdisciplinary) methods over political critique facilitate this centering of non-Natives. In my own work, I strive, usually imperfectly, to counter this tendency by thinking and working in an anti-disciplinary mode. In my current project—which engages with diasporic film's relationships to settler colonialism—this means refusing to remain faithful to disciplinary demands of ethnic, gender, film, or settler colonial studies if and when they reproduce epistemic violence. Politically motivated and grounded work must be invested not in reproducing fields and disciplines, but in engaging in intellectual work to the extent that it facilitates social transformation.

Notes

1. J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, "'A Structure Not an Event': Settler Colonialism and Enduring Indigeneity," *Lateral* 5, no. 1 (2016), http://csalateral.org/issue/5-1/forum-alt-humanities-settler-colonialism-enduring-indigeneity-kauanui/. ↩
2. Lee Maracle, *I Am Woman: A Native Feminist Perspective on Sociology* (Vancouver: Press Gang, 1996); Patricia Monture, *Journeying Forward: Dreaming First Nations' Independence* (Halifax: Fernwood, 1999); Bonita Lawrence, *"Real Indians" and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua, "Decolonizing Antiracism," Social Justice 32, no.4 (2005): 120-143; Sherene Razack, ed., *Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2002). ↩
3. Lawrence, "*Real Indians" and Others*; Lawrence and Dua, "Decolonizing Antiracism"; Razack, ed., *Race, Space, and the Law.* ↩
4. Razack, "Introduction: When Place Becomes Race," *Race, Space, and the Law,* 1–2; emphasis in original. ↩
5. Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 388–389. ↩
6. In more recent work, Razack cites Wolfe's work—specifically his argument concerning the logic of elimination as foundational to settler colonialism—but her emphasis remains on the repetition of colonial violence. See Sherene Razack, *Dying from Improvement: Inquest and Inquiries into Indigenous Deaths in Custody* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015). ↩
7. Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (New York: Palgrave, 2010). ↩
8. Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," 388–389. ↩
9. For instance, see Iyko Day, *Alien Capital: Asian Racialization and the Logic of Settler Colonial Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Rita Dhamoon, "A Feminist Approach to Decolonizing Anti-Racism: Rethinking Transnationalism, Intersectionality, and Settler Colonialism," *Feral Feminisms* 4 (Summer 2015): 20–37; Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Y. Okamura, eds., *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawai'i* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008); Shona Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Tiffany Lethabo King, "The Labor of (Re)reading Plantation Landscapes Fungible(ly)," *Antipode* 48, no. 4 (2016): 1022–1039; Ruthann Lee, "Portraits of (Un)Settlement: Troubling Multicultural Masculinities in Dominique Hui's *Quiet North* and Kent Monkman's *Shooting Geronimo," GLQ* 21, no. 4 (2015): 459–499; Shaista Patel, Ghaida Moussa, and Nishant Upadhyay, "Complicities, Connections, & Struggles: Critical Transnational Feminist Analysis of Settler Colonialism," *Feral Feminisms* 4 (Summer 2015): 5–19; Juliana Hu Pegues, "Rethinking Relations:

Interracial Intimacies of Asian Men and Native Women in Alaskan Canneries," *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 15, no. 1 (2013): 55–66; Malissa Phung, "Are People of Colour Settlers Too?" *Cultivating Canada: Reconciliation through the Lens of Cultural Diversity,* eds. Ashok Mathur, Jonathan Dewar and Mike DeGagne (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2011), 289–298; Robinder Kaur Sehdev, "Lessons From the Bridge: On the Possibilities of Anti-Racist Feminist Alliances in Indigenous Spaces," in *This is an Honour Song: Twenty Years Since the Blockades—An Anthology of Writing on the "Oka Crisis,"* ed. Leanne Simpson and Kiera L. Ladner (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2010), 105–123; TJ Tallie, "Queering Natal: Settler Logics and the Disruptive Challenge of Zulu Polygamy," *GLQ* 19, no. 2 (2013): 167–189; Rita Wong, "Decolonizasian: Reading Asian and First Nations Relations in Literature," *Canadian Literature* 199 (Winter 2008): 158–180.

10. Tiffany Lethabo King, "New World Grammars: The 'Unthought' Black Discourses of Conquest," *Theory and Event* 19, no. 4 (2016).
11. Manu Vimalassery, Juliana Hu Pegues, and Alyosha Goldstein, "Introduction: On Colonial Unknowing," *Theory and Event* 19, no. 4 (2016).
12. Vimalassery, Pegues, and Goldstein, "Introduction."
13. Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014)*;* Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).
14. Kauanui, "A Structure Not an Event."

Bio



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Melissa Gniadek, "The Times of Settler Colonialism," *Lateral 6.1* (2017).

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Settler Colonialism

The Times of Settler Colonialism

Melissa Gniadek

ABSTRACT Response to J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, "A Structure, Not an Event: Settler Colonialism and Enduring Indigeneity," published in Lateral 5.1. Gniadek approaches settler colonialism via questions of time—asking When is settler colonialism?—which reveals how narratives of national belonging tend to operate, as narrative confrontations that facilitate violence throughout and across time.

Settler colonialism is often conceived of as a problem of space—of conflicting, violent claims to territory, and the differing ideologies upholding those claims. J. Kēhaulani Kauanui's attention to Patrick Wolfe's much quoted articulation of settler colonialism as "a structure not an event" in her call to make indigeneity a sustained part of conversations about settler colonialism reminds us, however, that settler colonialism is also a problem of time.[1] "Understanding settler colonialism as a structure exposes the fact that colonialism cannot be relegated to the past," writes Kauanui, "even though the past-present should be historicized."[2] This point reinforces Wolfe's own articulation of the relationship between his use of "structure" and "settler colonialism's temporal dimension" in the essay that Kauanui primarily draws from: "It is both as complex social formation and as continuity through time that I term settler colonization a structure rather than an event," writes Wolfe.[3] And later in the essay, he argues, "When invasion is recognized as a structure rather than an event, its history does not stop."[4] Distinguishing the "isolated event" from a notion of "structural complexity" that invokes the idea of duration, Wolfe, and following him Kauanui, emphasizes that to understand settler colonialism as a structure is to understand it as a system of relations in time and across time.[5]

The importance of recognizing the ongoing, "enduring" nature of structures of settler colonialism and indigeneity cannot be overstated. But Kauanui's focus on Wolfe's phrase ("structure not an event") can also help us to open up other questions about time as it relates to settler colonialism—questions about time that highlight not only how histories of invasion do not stop, but also how settler colonialism is defined by multiple, overlapping temporalities. Questions about the temporal dimensions of settler colonialism as represented in historical texts and materials motivate my own work in nineteenth-century American literature and culture, and in what follows I'd like to briefly suggest that one way to extend Kauanui's provocation regarding structures of settler colonialism and "enduring indigeneity" is to ask the question: "When is settler colonialism?"

"Where is settler colonialism?" is, in many ways, a more familiar and obvious question, in keeping with our understanding of settler colonialism as a problem of competing claims to territory. Indeed, despite the increasing attention to settler colonialism in US contexts, the question of whether US geographies can accurately be described as settler colonial spaces still seems to circulate. For example, a seminar in which I participated at the 2016 C19: The Society of Nineteenth-Century Americanists conference acknowledged that

settler colonialism has recently become a popular way to explain "nineteenth and twentieth-century imperial formations around the globe" and set out to consider "the usefulness of [the settler colonial] model in a North American context." "Was there settler colonialism in North America," the seminar call for papers queried, "and if so, where?"[6]

In the ensuing seminar discussion, the urgency of the question of where the model of settler colonialism might be applied geographically seemed to be tied to where particular scholars located their disciplinary home (History, Literary Studies, etc.). Some were more concerned than others with whether or not conceptions of settler colonialism deployed in Commonwealth countries accommodated US histories. But whether individual participants in the seminar were inclined to view settler colonialism as applicable to US space or not, as a method or theory, or a discourse or practice, many seemed to agree that adding "when?" to the questions "where?" and "who?" seemed useful, in part to emphasize settler colonialism as both a historical process and as something ongoing.

In asking not "where" but "when is settler colonialism?" then, I want to highlight the disruptive temporal potential embedded in recognizing settler colonialism as a structure that needs to be considered in relation to questions of indigeneity. Kauanui suggests such reconfigurations, for example, when she writes that "The notion that colonialism is something that ends with the dissolving of the British colonies when the original thirteen became the early US states has its counterpart narrative in the myth that indigenous peoples ended when colonialism ended."[7] Part of acknowledging that settler colonialism and indigeneity endure is acknowledging how they transcend the temporal boundaries sometimes placed upon them. But I want to highlight how the temporal dimensions of settler colonialism involve movement in multiple directions and how recognizing the multiple temporal nodes of settler colonialism might point to additional ways for disciplines to speak to each other around reconceptions of temporalities.

Of course, one place where the multiple temporalities of settler colonialism are evident is in the historical narratives crafted to attempt to legitimate settler claims, to legitimate settler occupation of North American spaces while negotiating evidence of other times and claims to those spaces. In the nineteenth century the Mound Builder myth, for example, explained the archaeological evidence of past civilizations by suggesting the existence of earlier agrarian people who had been replaced by contemporary, nomadic indigenous groups. According to this line of thinking, present-day indigenous peoples were not the original inhabitants of North America, so US Indian removal policies could be more easily justified.[8]

In a related vein, Annette Kolodny has recently explored what she calls "The Politics of Prehistory" in her discussion of how the Vinland sagas, two medieval Icelandic tales, were deployed to create narratives of belonging for US settlers. In Kolodny's account, stories about territorial discoveries and legacies (Vikings or Columbus? When and where?) are always linked to questions about who really "belongs" in US national space—to "our understanding of who we think we are as Americans."[9] By appropriating accounts of long-ago encounters with North American spaces, settlers from the colonial through the national period negotiated their own sense of belonging in spaces always already inhabited by others.

These are just two examples of how the structures of settler colonialism include violent Euro-American claims on geographic space—on territory—but also include narrative confrontations with multiple temporalities. These temporalities emerge from the pasts of a place as they are encountered in a present moment, as well as from within historical narratives crafted as settlers work to claim belonging that is simultaneously never belonging. In other words, these examples remind us that the structures of settler

colonialism not only endure, but in their most fundamental manifestations are always moving between pasts, presents, and imagined futures.

In other cases, paying attention to the times of settler colonialism allows us to situate the ongoing nature of settler colonialism within a *longue durée* that can help us to re-think periodization across disciplinary boundaries. Kauanui offers some examples of how settler colonial pasts play out in our contemporary moment, and I want to turn, briefly, to another example that helps us to look to narratives about distant pasts to trace conversations about identity and belonging, allowing us to integrate much longer histories and various temporalities into conversations about the structures of settler colonialism. The Kennewick Man is one of North America's most notorious recent archaeological finds. In July 1996, two college students came across a skull on the banks of the Columbia River in Washington State. Police discovered more bones in the area, and the coroner called a local forensic anthropologist who initially noted that the skeleton "was physically distinct from skeletons of American Indians of the last several thousand years."[10] Based on these physical differences the anthropologist, James Chatters, initially imagined that the skeleton was that of an early European trader or settler. This assumption was complicated, however, by the presence of a cascade point, a spear point used by Paleo-Indians, embedded in the pelvis. The temporal complication presented by the cascade point was resolved when radiocarbon dating of a bone fragment revealed the skeleton to be approximately 9,500 years old, making it one of the most complete ancient skeletons ever found. Clearly, these were not the remains of a European colonial settler.

The discovery of the Kennewick Man brought a very distant past into contact with the present, and the remains quickly generated significant controversy about relationships between past and present in a settler colonial context. The US Army Corps of Engineers claimed authority over the bones since they were found on Corps land ceded by the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation under an 1855 treaty. But according to the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), human remains could be returned to an indigenous group demonstrating "cultural affiliation" with those remains. A number of Native American groups filed for repatriation of the remains. Eight scientists filed a suit challenging the repatriation, arguing that the remains were too old to be affiliated with any current Native American group and that the Kennewick Man is a human ancestor who belongs to all of us—to the American public. Other special-interest groups also entered the fray. For example, a California-based neo-Norse group called the Asatru Folk Assembly filed their own suit, claiming the Kennewick Man as their ancestor. And individuals filed claims too. "I've looked at that mountain most of my life. And I imagine he looked at that mountain too," proclaims one local Washington claimant in a television interview, imagining a place-based, spiritual, if not an ancestral or biological tie to the skeleton.[11] Other individuals who filed claims did so in part to highlight what they perceived to be the absurdity of asserting kinship with nearly 10,000 year-old bones. Indeed, morphological studies of the skeleton showed Kennewick Man to be atypical of any modern people, raising questions about possession of remains and their belonging to place, and about when fossilized bones cannot be affiliated with any particular group. And in 2004, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a ruling that the skeleton could not be determined to be related to any living indigenous group so that NAGPRA did not apply. More recently, however, a study published in *Nature* asserts that genetic analysis of the Kennewick Man's DNA reveals the remains to be "closer to modern Native Americans than to any other population worldwide," reopening the possibility for reburial under NAGPRA.[12]

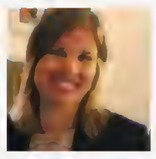
At the heart of these ongoing and complex controversies are complications surrounding science and indigenous claims to belonging, identity, and kinship. But these controversies

also draw attention, in rather extreme ways, to the many, long temporalities at play in the settler colonial context—in this case temporalities that extend back nearly 10,000 years. The temporal dimensions of settler colonialism are multiple, syncopated, and move in many different directions. While settler colonialism and indigeneity endure, they do so in relation to many times. Some of the attempts to "claim" the Kennewick Man in the name of humanity, science, and nationalism over the last twenty years have reproduced nineteenth-century revisions and appropriations of distant pasts, in part to attempt to legitimate claims on space. Indigenous claims of kinship, on the other hand, have highlighted the long timeframes underlying questions of settler appropriations. At the risk of a historically imprecise, broad provocation, my point here is simply that in addition to considering how settler colonialism and indigeneity endure into the present as Kauanui argues, we might also consider distant pasts, the historical narratives crafted to contain them, and the many temporalities at play in the question "When is settler colonialism?" Considering the many "whens" of settler colonialism can help us to unsettle our engagement with its structures across disciplines.

Notes

1. Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (Dec. 2006): 388.
2. J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, "'A structure, not an event': Settler Colonialism and Enduring Indigeneity," *Lateral* 5, no. 1 (2016), http://csalateral.org/issue/5-1/forum-alt-humanities-settler-colonialism-enduring-indigeneity-kauanui/.
3. Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism," 403; 390.
4. Ibid., 402.
5. Ibid., 399
6. Amy S. Greenberg and Ari Kelman, "Settler Colonialism and Territorial Expansion." See http://c19conference.org/seminars/, accessed June 9, 2016.
7. Kauanui, "A structure," np.
8. For a similar account of the Mound Builder myth, see Melissa Gniadek, "Seriality and Settlement: Southworth, Lippard, and *The Panorama of the Monumental Grandeur of the Mississippi Valley*," *American Literature* 86, no. 1 (March 2014): 51.
9. Annette Kolodny, *In Search of First Contact: The Vikings of Vinland, the Peoples of the Dawnland, and the Anglo-American Anxiety of Discovery* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 11.
10. James C. Chatters, *Ancient Encounters: Kennewick Man and the First Americans* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 41.
11. *Kennewick Man: An Epic Drama of the West*, directed by Kyle Carver and Ryan Purcell (New York: Filmakers Library, 2002), DVD.
12. Morten Rasmussen, Martin Sikora, Anders Albrechtsen, Thorfinn Sand Korneliussen, J. Victor Moreno-Mayar, G. David Poznik, Christoph P. E. Zollikofer, Marcia S. Ponce de Léon, Morten E. Allentoft, Ida Moltke, Hákon Jónsson, Cristina Valdiosera, Ripan S. Malhi, Ludovic Orlando, Carlos D. Bustamante, Thomas W. Stafford Jr, David J. Meltzer, Rasmus Nielsen, and Eske Willerslev, "The Ancestry and Affiliations of Kennewick Man," *Nature* 523 (23 July 2015): 455.

Bio



Melissa Gniadek

Melissa Gniadek is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at the University of Toronto, where she teaches nineteenth-century American literature and culture. Her current book projects involve temporalities of

settlement in US contexts and the Pacific "at home" in nineteenth-century America. Her work has appeared in journals including *American Literature*, *Early American Literature*, *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists*, and *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers*.

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Settler Colonialism

Thinking with Melissa Gniadek and Beenash Jafri

J. Kēhaulani Kauanui

ABSTRACT

In “The Times of Settler Colonialism,” Melissa Gniadek urges me to go beyond the formulation of settler colonialism conceived as a problem of space. She pushes to further consider how Wolfe’s theorization of settler colonialism as structure (not an isolated episode) to examine “not only how histories of invasion do not stop, but also how settler colonialism is defined by multiple, overlapping temporalities.” Informed by her own work on nineteenth century American literature and its representations of the temporal dimensions of settler colonialism, Gniadek extends my focus on “enduring indigeneity” to go beyond the question of *where* is settler colonialism to ask, *when* is settler colonialism?, thus examining settler colonialism as a historical process that is ongoing. Gniadek further seeks to “highlight the disruptive temporal potential embedded in recognizing settler colonialism as a structure that needs to be considered in relation to questions of indigeneity.” Moreover, Gniadek explains that her aim is to underscore how the “temporal dimensions of settler colonialism involve movement in multiple directions and how recognizing the multiple temporal nodes of settler colonialism might point to additional ways for disciplines to speak to each other around reconceptions of temporalities.” One example is the historical narratives settlers craft to legitimate their occupation while also “negotiating evidence of other times and claims to those spaces” such as archaeological explanations of explorations and even civilizations that predate the ancestors of present-day Indigenous peoples, and thus aim to challenge and contain Native claims. As such, she importantly asserts, “structures of settler colonialism not only endure, but in their most fundamental manifestations are always moving between pasts, presents, and imagined futures.” Consequently, offering valuable insight, Gniadek illuminates the temporal dimensions of settler colonialism that move beyond (my) simply asserting that settler colonialism and indigeneity endure into the present.

In “Ongoing Colonial Violence in Settler States,” Beenash Jafri offers a different route and context for contemporary work in settler colonial studies that makes visible some prior and important intellectual work and distinct stakes for those engaged in queer/feminist of color and decolonizing research and activism. Jafri suggests that settler colonial studies became institutionalized through Lorenzo Veracini’s *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (2010) and Varacini’s launching of the journal *Settler Colonial Studies* (2011), while her own point of engagements were located in earlier critical race and Indigenous studies. Jafri takes up select works by critical race and Native feminist scholars that preceded what she sees as the institutionalized formation of settler colonial studies as a field, addressing intertwined forms of colonial and racialized violence, and highlighting the

role of white supremacy in nationalist practices and mythologies. For example, Jafri looks at how Sherene Razak has theorized settler society in a way that does not posit that settler colonialism is "a structure, not an event," but that entails the continued repetition of colonial violence and relationship based on colonial domination. Jafri makes a firm distinction between works such as Razak's (along with those produced by Lee Maracle, Bonita Lawrence, et al.) and settler colonial studies in its current form by suggesting that the interventions emerging from critical race and Indigenous studies focus on how ongoing colonization works as it manifests through institutions, discourses, ideologies, and practices—rather than describing what settler colonialism looks like. She further suggests that the difference lies in the starting point of each, and that for the works emerging from critical race and Indigenous studies the "intellectual, political, and ethical commitments were to confront that violence, rather than to better understand settler colonialism per se." Her point is very important and well taken—especially in order to avoid re-centering the settlers at the expense of those subject to their violence, and to actively promote decolonization (and not by merely by pointing to Indigenous resistance, either). Yet, Jafri also acknowledges how theoretical work such as Wolfe's offers a useful framework with clear parameters, which may embolden scholarly and activist contentions that colonization is ongoing.

I would like to add here, though, that Wolfe's work did more than that, in that he offered us a theory of settler colonialism through careful historical work that is comparative—notably bringing Australia, the USA, and Israeli-Palestine into the same frame—to enable the analytical distinctions between it and franchise colonialism (not just because of its operative logic of "the elimination of the native," but through its attendant practices that logic ushers). More specifically, Wolfe's theory of structural genocide enables an understanding of how settler colonialism manifests. In other words, I do not think Wolfe's work is limited to describing what settler colonialism looks like (as it differs from other forms of colonialism), but that he also showed how it is violently enacted through institutions' structures, discourses, ideologies, and practices. And because of this, I find the discrepancy Jafri draws "between arguing that colonization is ongoing, and arguing that colonization is a structure" to be curious since it is arguably ongoing *because* it is formidable structure. She goes on to say that the former emphasizes "the continual reenactment of colonization, whereas the latter emphasizes the totalizing effects of originary violence, emphasizing colonization's erasures"—and that "there are political-ethical implications to highlighting one over the other." However, I do not think that Wolfe emphasizes one over the other since his theory highlights the productive nature of settler colonialism—what it creates in order to replace, not just how it destroys. And because of that, his work need not preclude crucial examinations of how colonial violence is racialized, gendered, and sexualized. That he accounted for the racial grammar of settler colonialism indicates the suppleness of his theory—even as he did not go further to take up how gender and sexuality work in these contexts. My point is that Wolfe's work does not foreclose these lines of inquiry (though some readings of him might do just that), though I agree that it is extremely important to account for the earlier work of Native scholars and scholars of color in theorizing the intricate workings of colonial violence. Jafri's related point—that highlighting the repetition of colonial violence may enable the centering of Indigenous peoples—is also well taken. But Wolfe understood that to be the work of Indigenous studies (especially in accounting for Indigenous resistance), a field he understood as distinct from settler colonial studies—which is what my own essay strove to examine (the differences between the two). And that also means—as Jafri demonstrates—that settler colonial studies as a field is distinct from critical race studies, feminist studies, queer of color critique, and more.

In closing, I want to acknowledge that Jafri's alternate lineage is extremely important—

and to return to another genealogy that I offered in a footnote of my original essay. That is, that settler colonialism was theorized early on in the Palestinian and Hawaiian contexts. And, although the scholars I mention in that note did not offer a grand theory like Wolfe's (or even Varacini's, which also differs substantially from Wolfe's), given that they were not comparative works, it is perhaps because they document and theorize *both* the continual reenactment of colonization and the totalizing effects settler colonial projects intend (but never fully achieve due to enduring indigeneity), that I question the assertion that settler colonial studies emphasizes colonization's erasures over the continual reenactment of colonization.

Bio



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J. Kēhaulani Kauanui is a Professor of American Studies and Anthropology at Wesleyan University, where she teaches comparative colonialisms, indigenous studies, critical race studies, and anarchist studies. Kauanui's first book is *Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity* (Duke University Press, 2008). Her second book is titled, *Paradoxes of Hawaiian Sovereignty*, and is a critical study on land, gender and sexual politics and the tensions regarding indigeneity in relation to statist Hawaiian nationalism (forthcoming with Duke University Press, 2018). Kauanui serves as a radio producer for an anarchist politics show called, "Anarchy on Air." She previously hosted the radio show, "Indigenous Politics," which aired for seven years and was broadly syndicated. She is an original co-founder of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association.

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New Materialist Philosophy

Exploring the Promise of New Materialisms

Chad Shomura

ABSTRACT Response to Kyla Wazana Tompkins, "On the Limits and Promise of New Materialist Philosophy," published in Lateral 5.1. Shomura mediates upon the promise and possibilities that new materialisms affords in its attentiveness to the material.

In "On the Limits and Promise of New Materialist Philosophy," Kyla Tompkins provides a fine critical overview of the still-emerging new materialism and its relation to established fields.[1] Through feminist, queer, and critical race theory, Tompkins offers correctives to new materialism that are especially important for those who share my background in political theory. Prominent strands of new materialism have been pioneered by political theorists such as Jane Bennett, William Connolly, Diana Coole, and Samantha Frost; Kathy Ferguson, Anatoli Ignatov, and Sharon Krause have also offered compelling engagements.[2] One may gain much from these rich accounts of matter and materiality yet remain uneasy over their turn away from if not marginalization of race, sexuality, and gender. When political theory learns more from feminist, queer, and critical race theory, its insights into new materialism may productively inflect the nature and conduct of cultural and American studies. In what follows, I draw upon such insights to extend Tompkins's account and to identify several other promising directions for new materialist studies.

"New Materialism" is an umbrella term for a broad range of scholarship that attends to matter as a key component of events, lives, and worlds. New materialists examine the materiality of humans and nonhumans alike. Oftentimes, they excavate bits of liveliness from what might seem to be most inert: rocks, machines, dead bodies . . . The generative force of matter is less an intrinsic property than a situated capacity. New materialists are thus fond of concepts like assemblage and ecology. They share a number of other common beliefs: the human is merely one form of being amongst others; no being necessarily bears more value than another; causality is not mechanistic but emergent; agency is slippery and distributed; and power slides across various spatiotemporal scales, from planetary and even cosmic terrains to the teeniest nooks and crannies of ordinary life.

New materialisms have been particularly helpful in addressing the crises instigated or intensified by anthropogenic climate change. Many hold that the parsing of life and matter throughout majoritarian Western thought has enabled the human to catalyze the ecological disasters of capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism. New materialisms reject fantasies of human mastery and affirm the entanglement of humans with nonhuman animals, vegetables, and minerals. They emphasize that, as artist and poet Jess X. Chen puts it, what we do to the earth is what we do to ourselves.[3] New materialisms aid in the expansion of care and concern beyond the human as well.

At stake in the 'newness' of new materialisms is whether shifting configurations of matter are understood to be novel events, or late episodes and mutations of longer histories.[4] "We need to always ask," Tompkins writes, "what is the heroic narrative that [new materialism's] putative 'newness' seeks to instantiate?"[5] New materialism is often pitched as a reaction to the so-called "linguistic turn" in the humanities, when social constructivists and poststructuralists supposedly buried their noses into texts so deeply that they lost sight, scent, and touch of ink and browning pages. Tompkins rightly observes that new materialist critiques of representationalism often sweep away analyses of race, sex, and nation while dismissing them as "identity politics." In this way, new materialism suppresses different lived experiences of power to ontology, neglects the insights of feminist and queer theory as well as indigenous cosmologies, and stumbles when it comes to race. (I would add that Marxist responses find the vibrancy of things to be a symptom of commodification.[6])

Tompkins offers feminist, queer, and critical race theory as correctives to new materialism. While agreeing with her criticisms, I propose that we also attend to work from those areas that serve as powerful counter-currents *within* new materialist studies. There are the creative refashionings of the materiality of race by Rachel Lee, Diana Leong, Jasbir Puar, Frances Tran, and, in his tricky project to "re-ontologize race" via notions of phenotype as dynamic and ecological, Arun Saldanha.[7] There are the material feminisms of Stacy Alaimo, Karen Barad, Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz, and Elizabeth Wilson.[8] There are rich new materialisms in queer theory as well, such as Lee Edelman's turn to mechanization in the death drive, Jack Halberstam's provocative work on "the wild," José Esteban Muñoz's untimely project on the brown commons, and various queer inhumanisms found in a special issue of *GLQ* edited by Mel Chen and Dana Luciano.[9] Finally, I have learned much from new materialist projects across these and other fields by emerging scholars such as Stephanie Erev, Jishnu Guha-Majumdar, Huan He, Heidi Hong, Quinn Lester, and Yuhe Faye Wong.[10]

These thinkers may not identify as new materialists, and describing them as such admittedly risks a fall into the woes of diversity initiatives within the neoliberal university. But locating their projects at the heart of new materialism underscores the elisions and shortcomings of new materialisms that presume so-called "minority studies" to be incapable of making contributions to theory; emphasizes that feminist, queer, ethnic, disability, and indigenous scholarship are vital to syllabi and literature reviews of new materialism; and insists that efforts to cultivate an ethics and politics of the reassembled human must address the sociopolitical and epistemological conditions that have differentiated humans and the humanities through the racialized, gendered, sexualized, colonialist, and ableist metaphysics of life and matter.

When new materialisms follow the examples I outlined above, they may assist cultural and American studies scholars, as Tompkins outlines, in undoing the subject and the human; interrogating liberal personhood; investigating bodily affect as an avenue toward political collectives; following the insights of ecological thought; and better discerning connections between structures of feeling, biopower, surveillance, and capital. Following Dana Luciano, Tompkins finds that the highest promise of new materialism lies in its calibration of the sensorial machinery that produces critique.[11]

These are all valuable intellectual and political goals, yet the place of matter and materiality recedes in this part of Tompkins's account and in broader efforts to attune new materialism to biopolitical issues. Though matter proves to be a slippery thing, I have tried to keep it in view while conducting my major research projects on impasses to the good life and on shifting notions of the human, life, and time in the Anthropocene. This cultivated attunement has led me to slightly different avenues of new materialist inquiry

that may be productive for American and cultural studies.[12] The first is the discernment of matter as an extension or medium of racial, sexual, and colonial practices. Informed by new materialisms, cultural and American studies may track social, cultural, and political life through artifacts, plants, and animals. This approach may follow Mel Chen's invaluable expansion of intersectionality to demonstrate how materiality and animacy operate as crucial vectors of power alongside those of race, gender, sexuality, ability, and species.[13] It may show how current theories of matter and materiality quietly turn upon sociopolitical histories that they disavow. This avenue of inquiry tends to innovate forms of politics that are not coordinated by agency and resistance, confined to the halls of consciousness, or in hot pursuit of subjectification.[14]

The second way is trickier because it dips into the treacherous waters of the ontological. If the previous route follows what is done *to and through* matter, this one asks what is done *by* matter? Does matter inflect the lived experience and politics of race, gender, sexuality, ability, and indigeneity, and, if so, *how* and *when*? Is the impact of matter reducible to the operations of ideology, structures of feeling, disciplinary practices, biopower, and governmentality? Or does it seem to have a force that exceeds those technologies of power? Tompkins rightfully disputes the new materialist separation of ontology from history while insisting that recourse to ontology often nullifies difference.[15] But to shy away from the ontological may say more about the notion of ontology to which one subscribes than what problems may exist with ontology per se. While Tompkins and many feminist, queer, and critical race theorists dismiss ontology and view the idea of matter as lively to be a rather old, widely-shared story, many new materialisms, by foregrounding an ontology of matter, are able to question, among other things, the anthropocentrism that frames many intellectual projects.

Don't get me wrong; I too am wary of ontology, for rock-solid definitions of being have been the blunt objects of racist, sexist, ableist, colonialist, and imperialist powers. Fortunately, there are many rich examples of critical engagements with ontology that are grounded in politics rather than a universal truth: Monique Allewart's fascinating elaboration of a creolized ontology of slave and maroon life in the American colonial tropics; Donna Haraway's imaginative notion of the Chthulucene; Brian Massumi's pathbreaking work on affect and more recently on the ontopolitics of neoliberalism and neoconservatism; Elizabeth Povinelli's profound critique of the ontological presumptions underlying biopolitics in her recent *Geontologies*; Jasbir Puar's efforts to entangle intersectionality with assemblage; Kim TallBear's work at the intersection of indigenous thought, critical animal studies, and new materialism; and Anna Tsing's beautiful ethnography of matsutake mushroom as a hinge between ecology and political economy.[16] From a different angle, Frank Wilderson and Jared Sexton offer provocative understandings of antiblackness as a political ontology.[17] One might discern a new materialist ontology in Mimi Thi Nguyen's compelling examination of how the animation of the hoodie by racial histories serves as a portal between human and thing.[18] Finally, there is much to learn from Zakiyyah Jackson's compelling and rich pursuit of an antiracist, queer, decolonial metaphysics through the transvaluation of being.[19]

The sort of new materialist studies that I find most promising neither dogmatically insists on *one* ontology nor avoids making *any* ontological claims (both efforts tend to share the same rigid notion of ontology as declaring the truth of being). It develops a more modest understanding of ontology, perhaps what Jane Bennett calls an onto-*story*.[20] Onto-stories maintain an emphatically speculative air. They may enliven imaginative possibilities or deliver the suffocating sense that forms of power have been unyielding despite an abundance of minor changes and real alternatives every step of the way. This type of new materialist studies takes up the difficult labor of navigating multiple ontologies, amplifying

minor connections across racial, gender, species, and material lines in order to challenge the powers that be while offering positive visions of other worlds. Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller and Noenoe Silva exemplify this work when they, with great finesse, bridge Western posthumanism and Native Hawaiian cosmology to critique settler colonialism in Hawai'i and to sketch relationalities that are not anchored in Western man.[21]

Following the last direction and building on Tompkins's and Luciano's emphasis on the sensory, the third avenue pertains to critique. According to many new materialists, matter limits human understanding. If that is so, then how might we attend to the impacts and worldings of matter? Can nonanthropocentric thought ever issue from humans? How might critique proceed in the face of what escapes or even impedes analysis? Valuable courses through these thorny questions are found in the poetics of affect theory, especially in the work of Kathleen Stewart.[22] For Stewart, ordinary life is an uneven terrain of near-happenings, stagnancy, and cascades of events. The intensities of whatever might or might not be underway place the senses on high alert for surprises, since the composition of a happening may be discerned only after the fact, and even then without full precision. That sort of sensory openness, which is cultivated in some new materialisms, may assist the navigation of archives, media, conversations, encounters, and the textures, dead ends, and byways of ordinary life. New materialisms help us tune in to the sometimes flat, sometimes fuzzy, sometimes painfully-sharp sense experiences that loom up around matter. Fidelity to matter may imbue critique with a valuable hint of messiness. It may lure cultural and American studies away from the seductive will to truth, away from drawing sharp images of the world for the purposes of hard-edged critique and toward welcoming bits of intuition, speculation, experiment, and open-endedness. It may furnish an ethos of "critical responsiveness," "presumptive generosity," and "agonistic respect," to borrow William Connolly's language.[23]

Proceeding from the insistence that matter has always shaped our world may not alter much knowledge about race, gender, sexuality, ability, and indigeneity. Yet every now and then matter catches us off-guard, making a difference beyond our control. My wager is that the effects of matter will become increasingly difficult to ignore as the seas rise and swallow land masses, as weather patterns and storms become ever more erratic and destructive, as droughts intensify, and as ecosystems destabilize and even collapse with the mass extinction of species. Those who are already deeply precarious will be even more harshly affected, others will experience newfound hardship and loss, and new opportunities for connection, creativity, and care will arise. In this onto-story, matter will play a starring role in the transformations of race, gender, sexuality, ability, and indigeneity. New materialist studies that follow similar onto-stories may not only historicize sociopolitical formations but also anticipate what they could be becoming, for good and ill.

Notes

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5. Tompkins, "On the Limits."
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and Its Prefixes conference, Berkeley, CA, October 3–4, 2015).
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12. Chad Shomura, "The Bad Good Life: On the Politics of Impasse" (PhD dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 2016), and Chad Shomura, "New Humanisms," *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 25, no. 1–2 (2016): 263–78.
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Bio



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Chad Shomura received his PhD from the Johns Hopkins University and will be Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Colorado Denver starting in Fall 2017. He researches and teaches affect, ordinary life, and ecology in the areas of political, queer, and feminist theory and American studies. He is currently working on two major research projects. The first, based on his dissertation, *The Bad Good Life*, examines how attachments to the good life inhibit the pursuit of social justice. The second explores shifting notions of the human, life, and time in the Anthropocene.

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New Materialist Philosophy

Rematerializations of Race

Michelle N Huang

ABSTRACT Response to Kyla Wazana Tompkins, "On the Limits and Promise of New Materialist Philosophy," published in Lateral 5.1. Huang reassesses the methodological implications of new materialisms by grappling with renewed attention to form in literary studies to articulate the varying processes by which racial difference becomes elided, rematerialized, and remade.

In November 2016, I attended an excellent panel at the annual Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts (SLSA) conference in Atlanta on the topic of heterodox science.[1] During the Q&A, one presenter, whose work situates UFOs within U.S. Cold War politics, was asked a question that in part queried if "she really believed in UFOs." The audience laughed, and once the chuckles had subsided, the presenter replied that it was convenient that they could quickly answer "no," while still affirming the intellectual value of pursuing such a project. I understood the presenter's point. Yet at the same time (and as the presenter themself acknowledged), such a disavowal reinforces the very values of scientific objectivity and distance their work seeks to challenge. Such questions of belief and nonbelief are even more fraught in relation to race, gender, sexuality, disability, and other axes of embodied difference. And so I was stung by the revelation that despite knowing that race is a mutable fiction that is socially and materially distributed through networks of power, I could never say, even for a moment, that I do not "believe in race." As a junior scholar working on the imbrications of scientific discourse with Asian American racialization, I want to refuse any Manichean question—of belief or nonbelief—that leaves a contained and singular definition of race intact. Instead, the great opportunity of New Materialism seems to lie, as Kyla Wazana Tompkins suggests in her pithy and provocative piece "On the Limits and Promise of New Materialist Philosophy," in pressuring *how* we understand what race *is*.[2]

This opportunity is still yet to be realized, as race remains underrepresented in the scholarship of New Materialism as well as in the bodies of those working within this sundry field. What results from this lack of representation are, unsurprisingly, too-quick dismissals of "representationalism," which as Tompkins argues, manifest as:

> the ongoing citation of "the power of language" or "representationalism" as a problem that is corrected by new materialism, as well as . . . loose and vague references to "identitarian thinking" or "identity politics" as a failure to ground and create productive political thought.[3]

In the domain of literary studies, her words offer a necessary reminder that collapsing the politics of difference into a teleology that amounts to "less representational=more radical=more better" serves no one, least of all minoritized constituencies whose creative experiments have always been disqualified as insufficiently imaginative or aesthetically-

minded. What is being represented has never been limited to the "real" experiences of minoritized peoples; it has always also been about how dividing practices of epistemology delineate worlds, cut (white, male) humans from (non-white, female, queer, disabled, animal) nonhumans, and disarticulate humans from their environments.

The question I want to explore in this brief piece is the following: What are the implications of New Materialism for literary analysis, a methodology so focused on the concretization of form? How might we revise our reading practices, tied as they are to sedimented notions of form, character, setting, and narrative progression? The implications of New Materialism for literary analysis have just begun to be explored, and, consequently, revisiting literary form is both counterintuitive and crucial. While such a return might seem to re-privilege language and representationalism in the manner critiqued by New Materialism, it is a necessary step towards engendering more comprehensive revision of privileged modes of reading and literary interpretation. Put simply, the critical pressure that New Materialist thinking exerts on existing epistemologies of being requires a concomitant reformulation of methodology, lest we reinscribe the same hegemonic terms of art. In my own areas of interest, feminist science studies and Asian American literary studies, I've been particularly inspired by the recent work of scholars such as Stacy Alaimo, Elizabeth Wilson, Rachel Lee, Rebekah Sheldon, and Aimee Bahng.[4] Their work, which insists on material embodiment while redefining the boundaries of the human, invites further exploration to re-materialize the aesthetic, to recall its definition as the "science of perception."[5] As Tompkins quotes Dana Luciano, "The most compelling contribution of the new materialisms is not conceptual or analytic, strictly speaking, but *sensory*. The attempt to attend to the force of liveliness of matter will entail not just a reawakening or redirection of critical attention, but a reorganizing of the senses."[6]

Following Tompkins following Luciano, we might root the experimental power of language in its challenge to our sensory-perceptual apparatus. As a graduate student housed in an English department, with all the disciplinary baggage that entails, I am interested in how New Materialism can aid literary scholars in modifying interpretive practices to articulate more precisely *how* the discursive is emphatically material. Such examinations, and their concomitant recalibrations of literary analysis, could potentially do much to reconcile the divide between the representational and deconstructionist modes of feminist, critical race, queer, disability, and animal theory.

Photo from: http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB122227270204871529

To speculate about how such a New Materialist reading practice might proceed, I turn to John Yau's 2012 poem, "Confessions of a Recycled Shopping Bag."[7] Yau, a student of John Ashbery, is a prolific poet whose relationship to his racial identity has been contentiously discussed in the poetry community. One flashpoint of particular note is a 1994 feud in which, after Yau criticized Eliot Weinberger's 1993 anthology *American Poetry Since 1950: Innovators and Outsiders* as narrow in terms of both representation and selection criteria, Weinberger castigated Yau as "creat[ing] a remarkable new persona for himself: that of the angry outsider 'person of color.'"[8] The fallout of the confrontation persisted long after the initial clash: in 2007, Al Filreis revived it by proclaiming "Yau doesn't have a political bone in his body and nothing really explains his attack (unless, as Weinberger hints, Yau had just lost his sanity)."[9]

Filreis's problematic reinscription of racial politics inside a poet's body evinces an ongoing confusion about what race is, and where it is located. So I chose this Yau poem as a

thought experiment, as it is ostensibly about a self-contained object and contains no overt markers of race. A frequent first reaction to works such as "Confessions" is the demand for proof that the text being examined is "about" race. Incoming American Studies Association president Kandice Chuh excoriates such "aboutness" in her Winter 2014 *Social Text* piece, "It's Not about Anything," where she argues that:

> aboutness functions as an assessment of relevance, and within the racialized economy of academic knowledge (canonical knowledge reproducing whiteness continues to center the US academy and thus ensures that higher education maintain its long tradition of contributing to the reproduction of social inequality), preserves the (racist) epistemologies of (neo)liberalism through a reproductive logic that is utterly unqueer.[10]

Demands for "aboutness" at their core misapprehend what race is; in order to shore up what Tompkins alludes to as the fantasy of "the atomic nature of the self,"[11] they compartmentalize, stabilize, and concretize what are distributed and multifarious phenomena. Further, I am deeply concerned about how "aboutness" reifies the belief in a master molecule for race—in our genomic age, DNA—by seeking something tangible, stable, and solid that can be definitively identified as "race." Instead of capitulating to aboutness, I am asking how Yau's poem presents an opportunity to think about how Asian American racialization is produced, circulated, and perceived (which is emphatically different than the poem being "about" race).

The subject of "Confessions" is multiply derivative. First, a recycled shopping bag is an auxiliary commodity product whose value inheres in gathering and containing other commodities. Second, recycled shopping bags are only important because of plastic bags.[12] The wayward plastic bag was imprinted in cultural memory by *American Beauty* in 1999 and then immortalized by Katy Perry's crooning "Do you ever feel / like a plastic bag / drifting through the wind / wanting to start again?" in the opening lines to her 2010 hit song "Firework." The plastic bag also looms large in contemporary environmental consciousness, and as such provides the cover image for the art book of the 2014 art exhibition *Petroleum Manga* organized and illustrated by environmental artist Marina Zurkow, and is the target of a growing number of bans worldwide (in the United States, most notably in California).[13]

Yau's poem, so short and sardonic as to render it doggerel, is below in full:

Yau's **Confessions of a Recycled Shopping Bag**

The third derivation lies in the poem's appropriation of the conventions of confessional poetry, especially its autobiographical "I." "Confessions" puts parodic pressure on the presumed self-importance of such an "I" by housing it in a denigrated commodity product. The anaphoric repetition "I used to be" conjures up a washed up country singer, a has-been. It also suggests the end of utility, as in "I [was] used to be." A different function and identity for each previous incarnation. The harsh doubling of consonants—"bottle," "wattle," "spittle," "piddle," and "colleague"—violently cleaves the words into two syllables, lending a machinic, punctuated, quality of production to the lines.[14]

Such fragmentation of the lyric-I suggests that reading the speaker as a singular persona is inadequate; the recycled shopping bag's lyric-I is distributed across space, time, and form in a manner that is more insidious than capacious. The poem is an example of what Charles Bernstein refers to as "sprung lyric," which "stands between the sentence-driven and discursive drives of the new prose-format poems and the traditional I-centered free

verse lyric of personal sincerity or epiphany."[15] "I" is a container, like the recycled shopping bag, of these various colors, products, and objects, both human and nonhuman, but one whose various transmutations are only visible once narrated. The undeviating opening of each line contrasts with their variegated closings, stressing the inflexibility and immovability of "I" while simultaneously undermining what "I" comprises.[16] The multiple scales of the recycled shopping bag's former lives—chemical, human, digital—are not so much a democratic horizontalization of things than a mocking invitation to think about what transactions of capitalist production bring them together in mean coincidence. What racialized and gendered forms of labor are absented and made invisible by our obdurate focus on "I"?

I will close with the vivid colors of the poem—purple, blue, turquoise, pink, red, cobalt, and garish chartreuse. The repeated insistence on assigning colors to the objects makes color a significant characteristic where it might not be otherwise; it's worth noting that the collection the poem hails from is called *Further Adventures in Monochrome*. And here's where the poem can help us think about racial logics of identification. Colorism is inextricable from racialism; the overdetermined visual epistemology of race is tied to melanin and skin color.[17] If one mundane object can have been so many colors, then the poem suggests the banal mechanism of racial identification is less an essential characteristic than one repeatedly transformed through various different means of production. Furthermore, the poem's attribution of psychological adjectives to the colors —beaming, domesticated, phony, pleasant—reminds us that colors possess affective qualities that make us feel, or qualia. Such intersubjective broaching is that with which, Tompkins posits, object-oriented ontology cannot contend:

> In the OOO conversation, matter can never be apprehended as such: it comes into legibility only as form. In this way, OOO is extraneous to the conversations taking place in feminist, queer, and critical race theory, most of which take as true the idea that the relationship between discursivity and materiality is circular and, in Karen Barad's terms, intra-active.[18]

As feminist theory's signal insights on the subject/object divide remind us, there is still matter and meaning between objects and forms. The difficulty of perceiving such material entanglements does not make them any less animating or powerful. New Materialist understandings about the contingency of human form are productive not because they move us "beyond" race (they don't, and never will), but because they make visible how race is always embedded within the production of the cultural forms used to fabricate the human. To believe in race is to believe in racial formation as synthetic and syncretic, to percept that race traverses disciplinary boundaries, and to trace its material-semiotic links to places where it no longer seems to be "about" race at all. But most importantly, it is to understand that race is not something that resides only in the human outlines of raced bodies. There is no master molecule of race; following race all the way down means, per Donna Haraway, staying with the troubled concatenations of desire and matter that will always exceed our ability to capture and contain them.[19]

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. "On Heterodox Science: Anarchy, Creativity, Facticity" (conference panel, Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts national conference, Atlanta, GA, November 4,

2016).

2. Kyla Wazana Tompkins, "On the Limits and Promise of New Materialist Philosophy," *Lateral* 5, no. 1 (2016), http://csalateral.org/wp/issue/5-1/forum-alt-humanities-new-materialist-philosophy-tompkins/.
3. Ibid.
4. Here I'm only adding to Tompkins's robust bibliography, but most pointedly I'm thinking of Stacy Alaimo, "Thinking as the Stuff of the World," conclusion in *Exposed: Environmental Politics and Pleasures in Posthuman Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 169–188; Aimee Bahng, "Specters of the Pacific: Salt Fish Drag and Atomic Hauntologies in the Era of Genetic Modification," *Journal of American Studies* 49, no. 4 (2015): 663–683; Rachel C. Lee, *The Exquisite Corpse of Asian America: Biopolitics, Biosociality, and Posthuman Ecologies* (New York: NYU Press, 2014); Rebekah Sheldon, "Form/Matter/Chora: Object-Oriented Ontology and Feminist New Materialism," in *The Nonhuman Turn*, ed. Richard Grusin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015): 193–222; and Elizabeth A. Wilson, *Gut Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).
5. "aesthetic, n. and adj.", OED Online. Oxford University Press.
6. Tompkins, "On the Limits"; emphasis added.
7. John Yau, "Confessions of a Recycled Shopping Bag," in *Further Adventures in Monochrome* (Seattle, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2012), 22. See also https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/56542. Hereafter referred to as "Confessions."
8. Since this quarrel is not the focus of my inquiry, for more detail, refer to Dorothy Wang, *Thinking Its Presence: Form, Race, and Subjectivity in Contemporary Asian American Poetry* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 170–176.
9. Al Filreis, "Neither Us Nor Them, Part 2," *Jacket2*, September 23, 2007, http://jacket2.org/commentary/neither-us-nor-them-part-2. I don't need to defend Yau, as he does so quite well himself, most recently in John Yau, "'Purity' and the 'Avant Garde,'" *Boston Review*, April 29, 2015, http://bostonreview.net/poetry/john-yau-purity-avant-garde.
10. Kandice Chuh, "It's Not About Anything," *Social Text* 32, no. 4 (2014): 127.
11. Tompkins, "On the Limits."
12. As noted in a recent "Object Lesson" essay on tote bags as a response to the plastic bag, the allure of anti-plastic is so strong that in 2007 a rush on the "I'm not a plastic bag" cotton totes designed by Anya Hindmarch for Whole Foods resulted in 30 people being hospitalized in Taiwan. Noah Dillon, "Are Tote Bags Really Good for the Environment?" *Atlantic*, September 2, 2016, http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2016/09/to-tote-or-note-to-tote/498557/.
13. Marina Zurkow and Valerie Vogrin, eds. *The Petroleum Manga* (New York: Punctum Books, 2014).
14. Yau is not the only Asian American writer whose work has personified plastic—as I've written elsewhere, Ken Liu and Frank Chin also do in ways that highlight the plasticity of Asian American racial formation. See Michelle N. Huang, "Ecologies of Entanglement in the Great Pacific Garbage Patch," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 20, no. 1 (February 2017): 95–117.
15. Charles Bernstein, "The Expanded Field of *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*" in *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, ed. Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons, and Brian McHale (New York: Routledge, 2012): 281–297; Michael Leong, "Neo-Surrealism's Forked Tongue: Reflections on the Dramatic Monologue, Politics, and Community in the Recent Poetry of Will Alexander and John Yau," *Contemporary Literature* 55, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 501–533. Leong's incisive reading of "double embodiment" in Yau's

work helpfully highlights the body as a key concept in need of further excavation. ↩

16. Here I'm thinking of item 2 on Tompkins's list of examples for the uses of New Materialism for American Studies, Ethnic Studies, and Queer Theory: "the interrogation of mythologies of liberal personhood and sovereign agency by foregrounding the human body's autonomic 'prior-ness' to the social world allows for new avenues of political critique; however, dissolving the atomic nature of the self by thinking through bodily affect as collective and social is a political move towards collectivization and distributive agency that should be key." Tompkins, "On the Limits." ↩
17. See also Joseph Jonghyun Jeon's chapter "Reflections of Things: Ekphrasis and Racial Iconology in Cathy Song and John Yau" in *Racial Things, Racial Forms: Objecthood in Avant-Garde Asian American Poetry* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2012), 109–142. ↩
18. Tompkins, "On the Limits." ↩
19. Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 1–8. ↩

Bio



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Michelle N. Huang is a dual-degree Ph.D. candidate in the Departments of English and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the Pennsylvania State University. Her dissertation, defended in May 2017, explores posthumanist aesthetics in twentieth and twenty-first century Asian American literature and culture. Michelle's articles have appeared in *Twentieth-Century Literature*, *Journal of Asian American Studies*, *Amerasia*, *Journal of Medical Humanities*, and online at *Post45: Contemporaries*. In Fall 2017, she will be Assistant Professor of English and Asian American Studies at Northwestern University.

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Forum: Emergent Critical Analytics for Alternative Humanities
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New Materialist Philosophy

Response to Michelle N. Huang and Chad Shomura

Kyla Wazana Tompkins

ABSTRACT

I am very grateful to Michelle N. Huang and Chad Shomura for their extensive engagement with my short and rather off-the-cuff thoughts on the limits and possibilities of new materialism. Their detailed and thoughtful responses extend and flesh out the work that I started to do in my original essay, taking my bullet-pointed aggravation with new materialism's initial failure to deal with race, and using their own original research and interests to chart the direction and course of an extensive conversation that is, as they document, well underway. I am especially excited to see these two scholars take the time to give extensive shout-outs to both established and emergent scholars in the field. To see such radical intellectual hospitality in writerly practice is really thrilling.

One of those new scholars, clearly, is Michelle N. Huang, in her query into what the relation between the new materialism, race, and literary inquiry might be. I am totally sympathetic to her critique of the limits of identitarian critique—which she ties to Kandice Chuh's discussion of the intellectual limits of "aboutness" as a way of keeping minority writers tethered to a limited set of aesthetic problems. As well, I am one-hundred-percent persuaded by Huang's engagement with the problematics of the literary defense of "form" as that transcendent literary detail whose conscious artifice only serves to bolster the boundaries of a literary canon in which aesthetics transcend the apparent determinisms of history and politics. Against those limited hermeneutics, Huang poses a nuanced reading of a poem about an object in which the "form" of the object gestures to how "race is always embedded within the production of the cultural forms used to fabricate the human." The slippery subject-object relations of John Yau's 2012 poem, "Confessions of a Recycled Shopping Bag," give Huang a chance to explore how race might be embedded in a poem in such a way as to constitute a refusal to be "about" (says the poem: "*Confessions* is not a poem about race!") and a condition ("the refusal of this poem to be about race is nonetheless about a refusal of the poem to accept the conditions that make it possible for a poem, and therefore a poet, to claim or not claim humanity").

In this sense, thinking with the critical new materialism against the universality of the human, a category that has been claimed by some defenders of the aesthetic as the highest possible achievement that a poem can achieve, allows Huang, reading Yau, to open up a space in which literature works against its humanist imperatives, because, as Hortense Spillers writes: "The literary work describes, or carves out, an arena of choices, and in doing so, the writer suspends definitive judgment."[1]

I fully concur with Chad Shomura that at fundamental stake in the turn to matter is the unavoidable reality that the earth is speaking back to the human at a rate and on a scale that cannot be avoided in this current period of ecological disaster that is being called "the Anthropocene." I will note perhaps that the list of critics that he describes as working on the new materialisms from "within" the new materialisms instead of race, feminist or queer theory, are in fact already critical race, feminist, and queer theorists (Puar, Lee, Leong, Saldanha, and Tran) while the material feminisms he points to (Braidotti, Coole, Grosz, Barad, and Wilson) might well be feminist but at times fail to take up race. However, to say that "Tompkins and many feminist, queer, and critical race theorists dismiss ontology and view the idea of matter as lively to be a rather old, widely-shared story" is perhaps a bit speedy? I believe many of us to be engaged in the same work of thinking *with* matter as Shomura is and I look forward to future conversations with him, and to hearing about that work.

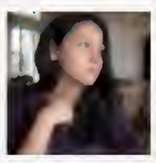
And indeed I find Shomura's account of the uses of thinking with matter in his own, new, project to be entirely in line with the work many critics—in particular women of color critics—are already engaged in, including some of those he names. Specifically I am thinking of those scholars whose work is drawing on the critical writings, as I point out in my own essay, of Hortense Spillers and Sylvia Wynter, whose long-ignored writing in political theory and the history of ideas is rightfully re-emerging into view as more than simply "cultural" but also as political theory in its own right. I am interested to see what kinds of methodologies emerge from the crucial question Shomura poses at the end: what does an "onto-story" look like? Especially I am convinced by his idea that "fidelity to matter may restore a touch of messiness to critique." This seems to me to be particularly true at the level of narrative form: what does a history of matter look like, and what temporalities emerge from thinking with materiality?

I'm all for messiness, more than a touch of it; it does seem to define the contemporary political moment from which we write. I look forward to future conversations with these talented scholars.

Notes

1. Hortense J. Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 84. ↩

Bio



Kyla Wazana Tompkins

Kyla Wazana Tompkins is Associate Professor of English and Gender and Women's studies at Pomona College. She is the author of *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the Nineteenth Century* (NYU Press, 2012) which won the Lora Romero prize for best first book in American Studies and the Best Book Award from the Association for the Study of Food and Society.

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Sami Schalk, "Critical Disability Studies as Methodology," *Lateral 6.1* (2017).

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Critical Disability Studies
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Critical Disability Studies as Methodology

Sami Schalk

ABSTRACT Response to Julie Avril Minich, "Enabling Whom? Critical Disability Studies Now," published in Lateral 5.1. Schalk calls for a shift in thinking that directly affects action and discusses creating classroom experiences that help students to critique intersecting social structures in their everyday encounters.

Reading Julie Avril Minich's "Enabling Whom?: Critical Disability Studies Now," I nearly applauded when she argued that critical disability studies is a methodology rather than a subject-oriented area of study. She writes: "The methodology of disability studies as I would define it, then, involves scrutinizing not bodily or mental impairments but the social norms that define particular attributes as impairments, as well as the social conditions that concentrate stigmatized attributes in particular populations."[1] This argument is essential to the future vitality of the field—one that has been gestured toward and even enacted by multiple scholars, but not to my knowledge articulated in this particular way. Following Minich, we can understand critical disability studies as a method, an approach, a theoretical framework and perspective—not (exclusively) a study of disabled people. One can study disabled people and not be doing critical disability studies and one can be doing critical disability studies and not be directly studying disabled people.

In some sense Minich's argument runs parallel to work in crip theory, a strain of disability studies theory that draws upon insights in queer theory. Robert McRuer proposes that crip theory "should be understood as having a similar contestatory relationship to disability studies and identity that queer theory has to LGBT studies and identity, [but] crip theory does not—perhaps paradoxically—seek to dematerialize disability identity."[2] More recently Alison Kafer has argued that crip theory allows for the inclusion of "those who lack a 'proper' (read: medically acceptable, doctor-provided, and insurer-approved) diagnosis for their symptoms" and "people identifying with disability and lacking not only a diagnosis but any 'symptoms' of impairment."[3] Scholarship in crip theory expands the possibilities of analysis in disability studies by moving away from more strictly medical, legal, and identity-based definitions of disability as an object of analysis. Minich's argument pushes this crip theory stance further by proposing a critical disability studies that is not dependent upon defining an object of analysis (no matter how expansive the definition), but rather focuses on the method of analysis instead.

In my own work I use the term *(dis)ability* to designate the socially constructed system of norms which categorizes and values bodyminds[4] based on concepts of ability[5] and disability. Other scholars have used terms like dis/ability or ability/disability system to refer to similar ideas.[6] I believe that one of the ways that critical disability studies can develop itself more clearly as a methodology is by using critical terms that work in parallel with terms in related identity / oppression / social justice fields. Race, gender, class, and

sexuality are all overarching terms that designate both marginalized (people of color, women and transgender people, working class people, queer people) and privileged positions (white people, men, wealthy people, straight people). By designating *(dis)ability* as a system of social norms which categorizes, ranks, and values bodyminds and *disability* as a historically and culturally variable category within this larger system, critical disability studies can better engage in conversations about the ways both ability and disability operate in representations, language, medicine, the law, history, and other cultural arenas. I use the parenthetical designation of (dis)ability because it gestures toward the mutually dependent nature of disability and ability. As bell hooks argues, the margins define the center.[7] That is, the marginalized space of disability exists around, and helps define the limits of, the centered, privileged space of ability. Further, for me, the curve of the parenthesis, rather than the back slash of dis/ability or disability/ability, also visually suggests the mutable nature of these terms. Rather than the hard, distinct line of the back slash, the parenthetical curve helps highlight how the boundaries between disability and ability are uneven, contestable, and context dependent. (Dis)ability as a term can aid in understanding critical disability studies as a methodological approach to studying power, privilege, and oppression of bodily and mental norms which is not dependent upon the presence of disabled people, yet is informed by social perspectives, practices, and concerns about disability.

Minich emphasizes that a critical disability studies methodology must engage issues of race and (dis)ability, including in areas not explicitly marked by disability. The distinction between *(dis)ability* and *disability* matter in terms of improving and increasing engagement with race in critical disability studies and vice versa. Consider, for example, how disability, in terms of claims of lesser intellectual abilities, was used to justify the enslavement of black people,[8] while at the same time an understanding of black people's bodies as hyper strong and impervious to heat and pain also justified conditions of slave labor. This racial double bind, to borrow from Marilyn Frye, positioned black people as at once disabled and hyper able and yet suited for slavery in both cases.[9] To engage these two disparate historical understandings of the black body, to parse the ways in which both disability and ability were used discursively to justify violence and oppression, we must discuss (dis)ability in relation to race within the specific historical and cultural context of the antebellum United States; and we must do so without anachronistically projecting current definitions of disability onto the past.[10] Critical disability studies as a methodology, therefore, can assess how (dis)ability as a social system worked in concert with systems of race during this period in a way that impacted all black people, both disabled and nondisabled. These historical insights can also help us understand how race and (dis)ability continue to be mutually constitutive in our contemporary moment. Furthermore, as Minich's list of subjects that scholars have not yet recognized as critical disability studies suggests, understanding critical disability studies as a methodology also means exploring issues of illness, health, and disease which often have important intersections with issues of race and class. Using (dis)ability as a term for a system of power that shapes bodymind norms and expectations allows for the inclusion of illness and disease no matter what the current definitions of disability might be.

To close, like Minich, I'd like to discuss how her argument impacts pedagogy in addition to research. Teaching critical disability studies as a methodology can be a way of shifting our students' perspectives on the world. I teach a lot of first person narratives and films that feature disabled people because many of my students have had limited contact with people with disabilities. It is important for me to expose them to art, culture, and representations created by disabled people. However, I emphasize to my students that my courses are not just about increasing student knowledge *about* disabled people, but also about changing the way students operate in their lives beyond the classroom, shifting the

way they think, behave, and interpret the world around them. Incorporating a critical disability studies methodology into my teaching, therefore, means helping students understand (dis)ability as a social system that impacts all of us in a wide variety of systemic and quotidian ways. I tell my students that if they find themselves checking to see if a building is accessible or correcting their friends who use "crazy" as an insult or questioning their own emotional reactions to inspirational stories of disabled people, then I have done my job. If they are reflective of their own desire for able-bodiedness or hyper-ability, if they begin to accept multiple ways of moving, thinking, communicating and being in the world, if they even begin to claim a disability identity for themselves, then I have done my job. If my students are thinking critically about issues of (dis)ability outside of class, then I have provided them with not just knowledge or facts, but a critical perspective, an approach to interpreting the world. I have given them some of the initial tools for using a critical disability studies methodology in their day to day lives. When these students go on to become social workers, doctors, lawyers, teachers, web developers, and more, they retain this critical disability studies perspective which impacts the way they do their jobs well after my course is over. This for me is one concrete way that critical disability studies can retain its investment in social justice and have an impact within the larger world, despite the real limitations of the academy that Minich elucidates regarding accommodations and disabled people in higher education. This pedagogical focus on critical thinking skills and on an altered perspective on the world is just one of the many possibilities that I find exciting and important about Minich's argument for a critical disability studies methodology and its role in the future of critical humanities.

Notes

1. Julie Avril Minich, "Enabling Whom? Critical Disability Studies Now," *Lateral* 5, no. 1 (2016), http://csalateral.org/wp/issue/5-1/forum-alt-humanities-critical-disability-studies-now-minich/.
2. Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory : Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 35.
3. Alison Kafer, *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 12, 13.
4. I use the term bodymind after Margaret Price who defines it as "the imbrication (not just the combination) of the entities usually called 'body' and 'mind.'" See "The Bodymind Problem and the Possibilities of Pain," *Hypatia* 30, no. 1 (2015): 270.
5. In her 2009 book, Fiona Campbell proposes studies in ableism and ability. Campbell makes clear, however, that "A move toward studies in ableism must not spell a separation with disability studies, rather the focus on ableism is meant to reconfigure a disability studies perspective and extend it" (198). Minich's argument for critical disability studies as a methodology provides an umbrella under which both disability studies as it has been most often practiced and Campbell's proposed studies in ableism might comfortably fit alongside one another. See Fiona Kumari Campbell, *Contours of Ableism: The Production of Disability and Abledness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
6. For example, Goodley uses dis/ability and Garland-Thomson uses ability/disability. See Dan Goodley, *Dis/Ability Studies: Theorising Disablism and Ableism*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014); Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory," in *Feminisms Redux: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. Robyn Warhol-Down and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 487–513.
7. bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000).

8. Douglas Baynton, “Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History,” in *The New Disability History: American Perspectives*, ed. Paul Longmore and Lauri Umansky (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 34–41.
9. Marilyn Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*, The Crossing Press Feminist Series (Trumansburg, N.Y.: Crossing Press, 1983), 3.
10. See Dea H. Boster, *African American Slavery and Disability: Bodies, Property, and Power in the Antebellum South, 1800–1860* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

Bio



Sami Schalk

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Jina B. Kim, "Toward a Crip-of-Color Critique: Thinking with Minich's "Enabling Whom?"," *Lateral 6.1* (2017).

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Toward a Crip-of-Color Critique: Thinking with Minich's "Enabling Whom?"

Jina B Kim

ABSTRACT Response to Julie Avril Minich, "Enabling Whom? Critical Disability Studies Now," published in Lateral 5.1. Kim elaborates upon a crip-of-color critique, which has possibilities to both criticize structures that inherently devalue humans and to take action to work toward justice. Kim's final call is to identify and act against the inequalities and harm of academic labor, urging readers to take seriously a "politics of refusal" that might help academics of color survive through alternative collectivities.

In her essay "A Burst of Light: Living with Cancer," writer-activist Audre Lorde positions disability and illness within ongoing struggles for racial justice: "Racism. Cancer. In both cases, to win the aggressor must conquer, but the resisters need only survive. How do I define that survival and on whose terms?"[1] I begin with this quote because for me, it exemplifies the kind of critical analytic that Julie Avril Minich imagines as a future horizon for disability studies. Minich's "Enabling Whom?" theorizes a disability methodology not attuned to the same questions of representation and legibility—what can currently be recognized *as* disability—but rather to the systemic de-valuation (and oftentimes, subsequent disablement) of non-normative bodies and minds. Akin to Kandice Chuh's formulation of "subjectless critique,"[2] Minich's conceptual move orients the field to its "mode of analysis rather than its objects of study," shifting disability from *noun*—an identity one can occupy—to *verb*: a critical methodology.[3]

In this response piece, I want to draw out some of the possibilities for coalition between women-of-color / queer-of-color feminist and disability theorizing, an alliance I and others have termed a crip-of-color critique.[4] I view Lorde's essay as an ideal point of entry for this enterprise. Presaging Minich's methodology, "A Burst of Light" brings into relief the intimate entanglements of race and disability unrecognizable under many of disability studies' dominant rubrics. Lorde, as Minich puts it, invites scrutiny of the "social conditions that concentrate stigmatized attributes in particular populations," or in this context, the disproportionate production of cancer within racialized and economically distressed communities.[5] For Lorde, cancer is not an individual property limited to and contained by her body's boundaries, but an extension of the state-sanctioned and extralegal systems that seek to delimit, contain, and exploit black life. This, to me, is a critical disability methodology: a mode of analysis that urges us to hold racism, illness, and disability together, to see them as antagonists in a shared struggle, and to generate a poetics of survival from that nexus.

Disability as methodology, too, prompts us to track the resonances across anti-racist, anti-capitalist, feminist, queer, and disability politics. Indeed, Minich calls for "a more capacious recognition of the activist movements to which disability scholars should be

accountable."[6] A critical disability methodology would thus radiate our scholarship outward from the single-issue terrain of disability identity, an expansion already occurring in the arenas of Disability Justice and crip theory,[7] and toward what women of color feminists have called "coalition through difference."[8] In this way, "Enabling Whom?" parallels Cathy Cohen's intervention in the groundbreaking "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens," which envisioned a queer politics where "one's relation to [dominant] power, and not some homogenized identity, is privileged in determining one's political comrades."[9] Just as Cohen complicated our understandings of "both heteronormativity and queerness" in the interest of "radical coalition work," emphasizing an intersectional analysis attuned to the disciplinary operations of heteronormative power,[10] so too does Minich disrupt our given understandings of disability—which have largely centered whiteness—in order to build more robust relationships with and across identity categories.[11] But what would these connections and coalitions look like, and what would they entail? What new modes of disability analysis and organizing could emerge from these intersections?[12]

To respond, I want to briefly expand upon crip-of-color critique as critical methodology, which draws primarily from the insights offered by Disability Justice activism and women-of-color feminist thought. Intervening into ethnic American scholarship that envisions liberation primarily in terms of self-ownership and bodily wholeness, a crip-of-color critique instead asks what liberation might look like when able-bodiedness is no longer centered.[13] Rather than reading for evidence of self-ownership or resistance, then, it reads for relations of social, material, and prosthetic support—that is, the various means through which lives are enriched, enabled, and made possible. In so doing, it honors vulnerability, disability, and inter/dependency, instead of viewing such conditions as evidence of political failure or weakness. A crip-of-color critique thus recognizes and centers the vast networks of support that enable contemporary life; as Rosemarie Garland-Thomson once observed, "Our bodies need care; we all need assistance to live."[14] It highlights modes of affirming, organizing, and supporting racialized life in which self-sufficiency no longer registers as an ideal.

Following Jasbir Puar, a crip-of-color critique thus asks us to conceptualize disability "in terms of precarious populations,"[15] which prompts disability scholars to engage more extensively with questions of state-sanctioned violence.[16] Such an engagement would, again, shift our understanding of disability from *noun*—a minority identity to be claimed—to *verb*: the state-sanctioned disablement of racialized and impoverished communities via resource deprivation.[17] Indeed, a crip-of-color critique urges us to consider the ways in which the state, rather than protecting disabled people, in fact operates as an apparatus of racialized disablement, whether through criminalization and police brutality, or compromised public educational systems and welfare reform. Further, as a critical methodology, it would ask us to consider the ableist reasoning and language underpinning the racialized distribution of violence. In other words, this mode of critique underscores the pathologizing language of the state itself, levied through accusations of insanity, criminality, stupidity, or dependency, which justify the expendability of racialized life. A crip-of-color critique thus aligns itself with the analysis of state violence central to the works of Cohen and other women-of-color / queer-of-color feminists, which—in distinction from nationalist, identitarian, or rights-based movements—refuse to frame the nation-state as a haven of protection. Such ideologies prompt us to move away from reform-oriented strategies that prioritize the attainment of legal rights, and toward more disruptive modes of organizing life altogether—radical imaginaries modeled, for instance, in the writings of disabled poet-activists Audre Lorde and Gloria Anzaldúa.[18] In this way, a crip-of-color critique continues the speculative project of world-making practiced by

Anzaldúa, which yielded the imaginary—and pointedly *crip*—geography of *El Mundo Zurdo* (the left-handed world): "the colored, the queer, the poor, the female, the physically challenged" were the primary inhabitants of this insurgent space.[19] Through the forging of *El Mundo Zurdo*, Anzaldúa enacts the poetics of survival I refer to above.[20] According to self-described black queer troublemaker Alexis Pauline Gumbs, such a poetics refers to the practice of using language and culture to intervene into narratives of expendability, and to instead inscribe an existence for racialized, impoverished, and disabled populations that refuses the violence of the present. Against the deadly imperatives of capitalism and the state, *El Mundo Zurdo* nourishes those people "on the bottom" who, "hand in hand, brew and forge a revolution."[21]

Of course, I could not complete this response without addressing Minich's call for disability as a *teaching*, as well as a research, methodology. What might it mean for universities to *meaningfully* incorporate disability into teaching and mentoring spaces, not just in terms of their content, but as fundamental to the ways in which they circulate, produce, and legitimate knowledge? Minich stresses the need for classroom accessibility beyond the constraints of diagnostic models, and I'll additionally note the intensified levels of scholarly productivity that mark us as fit or unfit for academic citizenship, as well as the systemic exhaustion of women of color (WoC) intellectuals, who typically assume greater service/mentoring duties while receiving less mentorship and support. In her essay "The Shape of My Impact," Alexis Pauline Gumbs describes how Audre Lorde and June Jordan were respectively denied a reduced teaching load and medical leave from their institutions (Hunter College and UC Berkeley, respectively), despite their documented battles with breast cancer.[22] This, too, is disability history: the overworked bodies of Lorde and Jordan in their institutional homes, subject to the twinned forces of cancer and institutional racism. And in the interest of our not repeating this history, I suggest that a critical disability methodology also necessitates a turn to what some have called "slow professoring": resistance to the relentless output and labor often held up as a measure of our professional value, and relatedly, resistance to the overworking of WoC intellectuals as a result.[23] This is, in a broader sense, a refusal to equate productivity and work with one's life worth.[24] Lorde and Jordan's stories also necessitate, as Gumbs suggests, a refusal to view the university as the only the legitimate site of knowledge production—WoC feminist and disabled intellectuals have long written and theorized outside the boundaries of institutional approval, and their words have survived nonetheless. Indeed, to take seriously disability as methodology is to take seriously this politics of refusal, to recognize disablement and racism as inextricably entangled, and to enact intellectual practices—like resistance to hyper-productivity—that honor disabled embodiment and history. It is to insist on survival in intellectual spaces for those, as Lorde famously put it, "were never meant to survive."[25]

Notes

1. Audre Lorde, "A Burst of Light," in *I Am Your Sister: Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde*, ed. Rudolph P. Byrd, Johnetta Betsch Cole, and Beverly Guy-Sheftall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 132. ↩
2. See Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian Americanist Critique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). ↩
3. Julie Minich, "Enabling Whom? Critical Disability Studies Now," *Lateral: Journal of The Cultural Studies Association* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2016), http://csalateral.org/wp/issue/5-1/forum-alt-humanities-critical-disability-studies-now-minich/. ↩
4. I use this term in my manuscript-in-progress, *Anatomy of the City: Race,*

Infrastructure, and U.S. Fictions of Dependency. The term "dis/crip of color critique" has also been used by Liat Ben-Moshe in the context of criminalization and incarceration, for instance, in her conference talk entitled "Racial-pathologization and the rise and potential fall of the carceral" and in her forthcoming manuscript.

5. Minich, "Enabling Whom?"
6. Ibid.
7. The performance and activist group Sins Invalid is a primary example of Disability Justice, as is the related movement-building work of Patty Berne, Mia Mingus, Stacy Milbern, Leroy Moore, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, and others. For crip theory, see Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: NYU Press, 2006), and Carrie Sandahl, "Queering the Crip or Cripping the Queer?: Intersections of Queer and Crip Identities in Solo Autobiographical Performance," *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 9, nos. 1-2 (2003): 25–26.
8. See Grace Kyungwon Hong, *Ruptures of American Capital: Women of Color Feminism and the Culture of Immigrant Labor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xxvi. Many scholars of women of color and postcolonial feminism have also employed some version of this concept. Some notable examples include Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, 4th ed., ed. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (Albany: SUNY Press, 2015); Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Press, 1987); Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984); Bernice Johnson Reagon, "Coalition Politics: Turning the Century," in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983) 356–368; Maria Cotera, *Native Speakers: Ella Deloria, Zora Neale Hurston, Jovita Gonzalez, and the Poetics of Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010); Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism," in *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003): 43–84.
9. Cathy Cohen, "Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?" *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 3, no. 4 (May 1997): 438.
10. Ibid., 453.
11. See also Sami Schalk, "Coming to Claim Crip: Disidentification With/in Disability Studies," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (2013), http://dsq-sds.org/article/view/3705.
12. I should note that coalition building between critical ethnic / queer / disability studies is already taking place. In addition to crip theory and Disability Justice, see Julie Minich, *Accessible Citizenships: Disability, Nation, and the Cultural Politics of Greater Mexico* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2014); Cynthia Wu, *Chang and Eng Reconnected: The Original Siamese Twins in American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press 2012); Ellen Samuels, *Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender, Race* (New York: NYU Press, 2014); Mel Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Nirmala Erevelles, *Disability and Difference in Global Contexts: Enabling a Transformative Body Politic* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011); the anthology *Blackness and Disability: Critical Examinations and Cultural Interventions,* ed. Christopher M. Bell (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2012), among others.
13. For scholarship that critiques the equation of self-ownership with political liberation,

particularly in the context of ethnic studies and ethnic nationalism, see Minich, *Accessible Citizenships,* and Maria Josefina Saldaña-Portillo, *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

14. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory," *NWSA Journal* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 2002): 21.
15. Jasbir Puar, "Coda: The Cost of Getting Better: Suicide, Sensation, Switchpoints," *GLQ: A Journal of Gay and Lesbian Studies* 18, no. 1 (2012): 154.
16. I do not wish to posit myself as a pioneer of this approach to disability politics. For other disability and proto-disability scholarship that critiques state violence (particularly vis-à-vis institutionalization), see Irving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (New York: Anchor Books, 1961); James W. Trent, *Inventing the Feeble Mind: A History of Mental Retardation in the United States* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994); Steven Noll and James W. Trent, eds., *Mental Retardation in America: A Historical Reader* (New York: New York University Press 2004); Steven J. Taylor, *Acts of Conscience: World War II, Mental Institutions, and Religious Objectors* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009); Nirmala Erevelles, *Disability and Difference in Global Contexts: Enabling a Transformative Body Politic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Liat Ben-Moshe, Chris Chapman, and Allison C. Carey, eds., *Disability Incarcerated: Imprisonment and Disability in the United States and Canada* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).
17. My understanding of state-sanctioned violence vis-à-vis disablement is informed explicitly by Ruth Wilson Gilmore's definition of racism: "the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death." See Gilmore, *The Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 27.
18. For examples of this kind of thinking in disability studies, see Margaret Price, "The Precarity of Disability/Studies in Academe," where she elucidates the concept of "crip spacetime"—forthcoming in the anthology *Precarious Rhetorics*, Wendy S. Hesford, Adela C. Licona, and Christa Teston, eds. (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press).
19. Gloria Anzaldúa, "El Mundo Zurdo," in *This Bridge Called My Back*, 218. See also Anzaldúa's conceptualization of the borderlands / la frontera: "*Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half-dead; in short, those who cross over, pass, over, or go through the confines of the 'normal'" (3). In *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Press, 1987).
20. I borrow my understanding of a poetics of survival from Alexis Pauline Gumbs's "'We Can Learn to Mother Ourselves': The Queer Survival of Black Feminism" (dissertation, Duke University, 2010). In this document, Gumbs draws upon Sylvia Wynter's definition of the poetic to explain the ways in which black feminist poets like Audre Lorde and June Jordan interrupted narratives of criminal black mothering to insist on new, affirmative meanings for black life.
21. Anzaldúa, "El Mundo Zurdo," 219.
22. Alexis Pauline Gumbs, "The Shape of My Impact," *The Feminist Wire*, Oct 29, 2012, http://www.thefeministwire.com/2012/10/the-shape-of-my-impact/.
23. See Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber, *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).
24. For a fuller explanation of disability as it relates to productivity, work, and life worth, see Sunny Taylor, "The Right Not to Work: Power and Disability," *Monthly Review* 55,

no. 10 (March 2004), http://monthlyreview.org/2004/03/01/the-right-not-to-work-power-and-disability/. For a thorough anti-work feminist critique, see Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

25. Lorde, "A Litany for Survival."

Bio



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Jina B. Kim is a Consortium for Faculty Diversity postdoctoral fellow at Mount Holyoke College in the program in Critical Social Thought. In August 2016, she received her PhD in the departments of English and Women's Studies from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Her research interests rest at the intersection of ethnic American literary, feminist-of-color, and disability studies, and she is currently at work on a manuscript on multi-ethnic U.S. literatures and cultures in the afterlife of 1996 welfare reform. In 2012, she received the Irving K. Zola Award for Emerging Scholars in Disability Studies. In Fall 2018, she will begin as Assistant Professor of English and SWG (Study of Women and Gender) at Smith College.

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Thinking with Jina B. Kim and Sami Schalk

Julie Avril Minich

ABSTRACT

It is an honor and a privilege to read these careful and insightful responses to my provocation by Jina B. Kim and Sami Schalk, two intellectuals whose body of work, in my estimation, demonstrates exactly the kind of critical engagement I had in mind when I proposed the idea of critical disability studies as methodology rather than subject. What is particularly rewarding about reading these responses together is noting how Kim draws on figures often aligned with ethnic studies (Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cathy Cohen) to elucidate how disability studies already functions as methodology in their work, while Schalk engages with crip theorists (Robert McRuer, Alison Kafer) whose work has provided the model for the approach I wanted to advocate. Asserting that my formulation of disability studies as methodology points to the importance of coalition among (apparently) disparate social and intellectual movements, Kim also asks readers of my initial essay not to stop at celebrating the possibility of such coalition but to actively imagine what it might entail. As a model, she offers brief but insightful readings of Lorde and Anzaldúa. She ends by addressing my call to consider disability studies as a pedagogical methodology and extends this call by reminding readers of the many (and damaging) forms that scholarly labor can take, suggesting that one way to push my argument is to consider the possibility that a critical disability methodology must also entail an embrace of the "slow professor" movement and resistance to institutional demands for scholarly "productivity." Meanwhile, Schalk addresses the power and importance of language by proposing that the methodology I propose might require a new critical lexicon. In particular, Schalk offers an especially helpful distinction between (dis)ability ("a system of social norms which categorizes, ranks, and values bodyminds") and disability ("a historically and culturally variable category within this larger system"). She points to the contradictory rhetorical uses of disability and ability to justify slavery in order to pinpoint the urgency of a term like (dis)ability. Additionally, she proposes that if disability studies is to embrace a specific pedagogical methodology, this must encompass not only the mode of instruction, as I initially suggested, but also the conceptual work being done in the classroom. We must, in other words, not just teach our students about disability and disabled people but seek to disrupt the ways in which they navigate systems of (dis)ability. What I particularly appreciate about both engagements is how seriously they took my proposition: Rather than simply accepting my proposition, they remind us that the ethical value (or lack thereof) in a disability studies methodology will lie in the form that methodology takes.

Bio



Julie Avril Minich

Julie Avril Minich is Assistant Professor of English, Mexican American & Latina/o Studies, and Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, where she teaches courses in U.S. Latina/o literary and cultural studies, disability studies, and feminist/LGBT studies. Minich is author of the book *Accessible Citizenships: Disability, Nation, and the Cultural Politics of Greater Mexico* (Temple UP, 2014), winner of the 2013-2014 MLA Prize in United States Latina and Latino and Chicana and Chicano Literary and Cultural Studies. Additionally, she has articles published or forthcoming in journals such as *GLQ*, *Modern Fiction Studies*, *MELUS*, and the *Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies*, as well as in several anthologies. She is currently working on a new book about U.S. Latina/o literature, compulsory able-bodiedness, and the racialization of health, which is tentatively titled *Enforceable Care: Health, Justice, and Latina/o Expressive Culture*.

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Leland Tabares, "The Contexts of Critique: Para-Institutions & the Multiple Lives of Institutionality in the Neoliberal University," *Lateral 6.1* (2017).

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Forum: Emergent Critical Analytics for Alternative Humanities

Institutionality

Issue 6.1 (Spring 2017)

The Contexts of Critique: Para-Institutions & the Multiple Lives of Institutionality in the Neoliberal University

Leland Tabares

ABSTRACT Response to Jodi Melamed, "Proceduralism, Predisposing, Poesis: Forms of Institutionality, In the Making," published in Lateral 5.1. Tabares invites us to question the role of what he calls 'para-institutions,' such as corporations, in shaping and influencing the logics and investments within the university. As a counterpoint to these processes, he ponders the possibilities of seizing upon the elements of proceduralism in mobilizing forms of collectivity that can span across institutional contexts outside the academy.

In describing first the neoliberal university's administrative proceduralism and then her conception of a "social being otherwise"—a radical mode of sociality that exists within the contemporary academy while disrupting its proceduralist processes—Jodi Melamed imagines structures of institutionality that resist the academy's institutional power while operating within it.[1] Her turn toward pedagogy emphasizes the importance of cultivating relationships between ourselves (as scholars) and our students.[2] Thus Melamed reminds us that critical investments in the academy always depend on the livelihoods of those producing criticism in addition to those consuming it. By highlighting these collectivizing experiences within the institution that houses them, her essay compels us to ask: What form might critique take within the neoliberal academy such that the context(s) of "social being otherwise" can be made legible and therefore able to exist as a collectivizing force? This question unlocks more questions: Considering that the university is always implicated within a network of institutions, how can critique be sustained by individuals outside of the immediate processes of academic proceduralism? What political potential does critique maintain for academics *and* non-academics in para-institutions, or institutions that are peripheral to the academy yet which directly overlap with certain proceduralist aspects of the academy? These questions are foundational to our ability as scholars to make an impact on the contemporary academy.

There is a certain idealism in taking "social being otherwise" to be uniquely poised to disrupt neoliberal proceduralism since such a form of sociality is constituted by the academic system of power itself. Melamed, following Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, sees "social being otherwise" as "a kind of comportment," a manner of being and acting in the academy, a style of behavior.[3] In this way, she takes otherwise-ness to be a positionality interpellated in a system of power within which acts of otherwise-ness are necessarily legible to others, since otherwise-ness must be able to be conveyed and received in order to be made manifest. What Melamed articulates is a field where "social being otherwise" is perceptible as a recognizable form of cultural capital that designates a certain relationship to power as well as a relationship defined by power. Therefore, in

order for there to be a "social being otherwise," there must be socially defined features within a field that classify being socially otherwise as a particular form of positionality. Pierre Bourdieu usefully elucidates this dimension in his work on taste in the artistic field: "taste is constituted through confrontation with already realized tastes; it teaches itself what it is by recognizing itself in objects that are themselves already objectified tastes. So, to understand tastes . . . first means understanding, on the one hand, the conditions in which the products on offer are produced, and on the other hand, the conditions in which the consumers 'produce themselves.'"[4] We notice this dynamic at play in Melamed's identification with other critics like Harney, Moten, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, all of whom gesture toward a "sociopoetical imagination" that registers otherwise-ness.[5] Yet, the desire for a critically otherwise collective within the academy risks insisting on a rarified radicalism—one that hinges on what Roderick Ferguson calls "a will to institutionality" because it depends upon the academy's recognition of otherwise-ness through institutional legitimation.[6]

To add, while the academy can be understood as a particular field of power that presents problems to scholars, the contemporary academic institution has also become increasingly a site of overlap for para-institutions—peripheral institutions that are not readily associated with the academy but which are directly implicated in some of its processes—such as late capitalist corporate institutions. These institutional overlaps complicate the form and audience of disruptive collectivities. Part of this point derives from an issue over scale. Depending on how close or how far back we want to scale our perception of the academy as an institution, we can always arrive at institutionality from a different contextual frame (e.g., the old liberal humanist university, the corporate university, the post-national university, the post-welfare state university, the imperial university, etc.).[7] The scale of our contextual frame of the academy as an institution determines the types of investments that get valued, the means by which those investments are legitimated, and the participants within the field. Recently, for example, at a January 2016 shareholders meeting at Apple Inc. in Silicon Valley, Apple's governing board vetoed shareholder Antonio Avian Maldonado II's proposal to implement accelerated diversity recruitment initiatives for senior management positions because, as Apple concluded, it was enough that they had already invested financially in HBCUs, minority disciplines within the academy, and women's leadership conferences.[8] Apple capitalizes on its institutional investments in minoritarian groups to justify discriminatory business practices in the name of diversity. Diversity functions as a form of investment rather than a pathway for personnel participation. Consequently, Apple is able to distance itself from accusations of racism and sexism. The neoliberal corporate institution upholds white male hegemonic institutional structures by profiting off of its specific ties to the academy. If minorities are not present in Silicon Valley, Apple's logic would seem to suggest, then it must be due to deficiencies in the minority workers themselves, not the company, because the company has already financed so much of their educational opportunities. These points of intersection between the academic institution and its para-institutions cannot be left unexamined because they are the sites where the cultural capital of academic investments overlap with para-institutional investments. By not pressuring these moments, we allow para-institutions to sustain their hegemonic processes in the name of the academy, thus turning the academy into a tool to be used by corporate entities and making the academy appear unfit to combat discriminatory practices outside of its own institutional contexts.

I suggest that we need to take seriously how critique can be made legible for audiences that have influence over the academy yet might not be housed within the academic institution proper. By doing so, we keep our students' well-being in mind because we are better able to provide them with the ability to influence others who are not necessarily

aware of the specific sociopolitical contexts of academic institutional politics and who therefore might not have the capacity to recognize otherwise-ness as a legible form of disruption. In short, disruptive potentialities need to be more identifiable across institutional contexts. If we ignore how the scales of institutionality affect our perceptions of institutional contexts, we risk precluding discursive possibilities and perpetuating the mainstream assumption that humanities disciplines like, say, those housed in ethnic studies are impractical fields of study for students because academic discourses are only relevant in the context of the academy. Put plainly, we risk further isolating the academy from the public sphere—an especially ironic stance for scholars working in minority disciplines (like myself) with disciplinary histories rooted in community-based activist politics.

So now what?

I argue for a critical position that relies less on establishing an affiliative group formation defined against neoliberal proceduralism and more on decentralizing the very structures that maintain neoliberal proceduralism. I see proceduralism's forms of durability as points of possibility to motivate critiques that institute a durable praxis. James Ferguson, in his work on anti-poverty politics in southern Africa, articulates my concern with critiques of neoliberalism that have a habit of dead-ending at an evaluative level, resulting in "a politics largely defined by negation and disdain," which he calls a politics of the "anti-."[9] As an alternative, Ferguson conceives critiques of neoliberalism through a politics of the "pro-" so that critique serves practical political initiatives that "take advantage of (rather than simply denouncing or resisting) recent transformations in the spatial organization" of governing regimes of power.[10] Similarly, in Critical University Studies, Jeffrey Williams laments the limitations inherent to "the protocols of criticism." He entreats scholars on institutionality to "switch stances" by offering "practical solutions" that are "more pragmatic."[11] Critiques of proceduralism then might actualize a praxis. If proceduralism's forms of durability derive from institutional structures that locate the academy as the centralizing system of power, I suggest that we employ a critical stance that contests those structures, one that radically integrates different institutional positionalities in order to frustrate the very stability and naturalization of categorical group formation. This form of radical integration is motivated by an intersectionality across scales of institutionality that destabilizes the boundaries of institutional difference, so the capacity for radicalism developed in one institutional context can be made more legible in another. Critique under this rubric would seek out practical, sustainable interpersonal collaborations with individuals across institutional contexts. Such forms of criticism emerge in cultural studies that emphasize sociological methodologies with social justice imperatives, where interpersonal exchanges take place between community members and academics. These moments of dialogue produce mutual exchanges that lend to forms of critique that decenter the critic—acknowledging the critic's voice as being inflected by individuals at a distance from the academy—and that force critical discourses to be made legible for audiences who are not necessarily housed in the academy. Nancy Abelmann's *The Intimate University*, for instance, integrates the voices and lived experiences of Korean American students through an immersive ethnographic study conducted at Indiana University.[12] Her work highlights how Korean American students are subjugated in the neoliberal university as subjects of liberal humanistic academic processes that value exposure to diverse experiences (read: diversity) as a pathway toward personal and professional growth, while these students also function as the very material objects that constitute diversity, making them simultaneously the subjects and objects of knowledge production for their (white) peers' growth at the expense of their own. The struggles faced by Korean American students in the academy ultimately affect their self-identity

and their experiences in other institutional spheres, such as their religious youth groups and family spheres. Likewise, in *Asian American Media Activism*, a book in media studies that employs sociological approaches, Lori Kido Lopez embeds herself in various community-based activist media outlets and digital media subcultures to constellate voices from disparate institutional backgrounds as they participate in structuring a sense of Asian American cultural citizenship across multiple scales of institutionality that pivot around the academy.[13] Furthermore, Moustafa Bayoumi's *This Muslim American Life* and *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?* powerfully critique our contemporary state-sponsored post-9/11 War on Terror surveillance culture by documenting its effects on the lives of Muslim Americans and Arab Americans living in Brooklyn.[14] In their own ways, these modes of scholarship disrupt the strict boundaries of the academy since their participants' voices and positions within other adjoining social institutions become more fluid. People in the community are not simply passive objects of critique that get appropriated by the university's legitimating processes; instead, they come to serve as active agents who decentralize the university as the legislating system of power on which proceduralism depends.

My hope is not that we create another group formation in the academy determined by an alternative affiliative essence of radicalism situated around a politics of the "anti-" but rather to motivate a politics of the "pro-" through an approach based on the contexts of institutional overlaps, where scholars can develop and maintain relationships within the university while also participating in community discourses in ways that more actively impact the multiple lives of institutionality.

Notes

1. Jodi Melamed, "Proceduralism, Predisposing, Poesis: Forms of Institutionality, In the Making," *Lateral* 5, no. 1 (2016), http://csalateral.org/issue/5-1/forum-alt-humanities-institutionality-making-melamed/.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Pierre Bourdieu, "The Metamorphoses of Taste," in *Sociology in Question* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 1994), 111–112.
5. Melamed, "Proceduralism, Predisposing, Poesis."
6. Roderick Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 214.
7. See, for instance, Christopher Newfield, *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-Year Assault on the Middle Class* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2008); Bill Readings, *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996); Jeffrey J. Williams, "The Post-Welfare State University," *American Literary History* 18, no. 1 (2006); Piya Chatterjee and Sunaina Maira, "The Imperial University: Race, War, and the Nation-State," in T*he Imperial University: Academic Repression and Scholarly Dissent*, edited by Piya Chatterjee and Sunaina Maira, 1-52 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).
8. "Apple Inc.: Notice of 2016 Annual Meeting of Shareholders and Proxy Statement" (Apple Inc., 2016), 60.
9. James Ferguson, "The Uses of Neoliberalism," *Antipode* 41, no. 1 (2009): 166.
10. Ibid., 169.
11. Jeffrey J. Williams, "The Post-Welfare State University," *American Literary History* 18, no. 1 (2006): 208.
12. Nancy Abelmann, *The Intimate University: Korean American Students and the Problems of Segregation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

13. Lori Kido Lopez, *Asian American Media Activism* (New York: NYU Press, 2016).
14. Moustafa Bayoumi, *This Muslim American Life: Dispatches from the War on Terror* (New York: NYU Press, 2015); Moustafa Bayoumi, *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?: Being Young and Arab in America* (New York: Penguin, 2008).

Bio



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Leland Tabares is a PhD candidate and the Bunton-Waller Fellow in English at the Pennsylvania State University. His research focuses on neoliberalism, institutionality, and professional labor economies in contemporary Asian American culture and literature. His dissertation project, tentatively titled *Asian America in the Age of Professionalization*, employs professionalization as a critical analytic to interrogate the neoliberal processes that construct, manage, and regulate Asian American working professionals in the contemporary university, Silicon Valley, the restaurant industry, and YouTube. Leland is currently serving a two-year term as the student representative on the executive board for the Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS).

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Forum: Emergent Critical Analytics for Alternative Humanities

Institutionality

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Neoliberalism, Racial Capitalism, and Liberal Democracy: Challenging an Emergent Critical Analytic

Tanja Aho

ABSTRACT Response to Jodi Melamed, "Proceduralism, Predisposing, Poesis: Forms of Institutionality, In the Making," published in Lateral 5.1. Aho pointedly argues that studies of institutionality all too often substantiate what she calls neoliberalocentrism, which readily posits neoliberalism as the singular paradigm into narrating a teleological development of history. Instead, she echoes Kim and Schalk to articulate 'crip-of-color materialism' as an analytic that thickens understandings about global structures of inequity and fissures within them.

> It is not just different structures of oppressive violence that radical scholars are trying to make legible, it is violence of a certain depth, with specific and morbid implications for some peoples' *future existence as such*.
>
> – Dylan Rodríguez, "Racial/Colonial Genocide and the 'Neoliberal Academy'"[1]

The forum editors Chris Eng and Amy King open their introduction with Lisa Lowe's words that "it is necessary to . . . imagine a much more complicated set of stories about the emergence of the now."[2] Lisa Lowe's historiography of intimacy at the confluence of racial capitalism and liberal democracy in the eighteenth and nineteenth century offers just such a "much more complicated set of stories." But so do the contributions to this forum on "Emergent Critical Analytics for Alternative Humanities," which offer much-needed reminders of the necessity of critical analytics that have remained all too lateral within our fields. The contributors also advance insights that are in conversation with or could be usefully engaged by another critical analytic that has currently taken a dominant hold in cultural studies: neoliberalism.[3] In the following, I want to discuss the politics of this emerging methodology that centers neoliberalism as an explanatory paradigm and a field of adversity in studies of cultural political economy, and outline some of the pitfalls that a shift from racial capitalism to neoliberalism engenders.

The particular analytic of neoliberalism has found a much wider reach than traditional studies of political economy, spanning from affect theory to queer studies, from animal studies to ecocriticism.[4] Across these fields, neoliberalism-focused analyses are influenced by two major thinkers. Most cited by far is critical geographer David Harvey, whose classical Marxist analysis sees processes of neoliberalization as part and parcel of the globalized class struggle for resource redistribution.[5] Then there are the writings of Michel Foucault, whose thinking has been highly influential in the field of governmentality studies, especially in respect to biopolitics, which for Foucault can only be understood as a disciplinary regime in the context of liberalism and its variances.[6] In their wake, the humanities have witnessed an abundance of work on neoliberalism, from political

philosopher Wendy Brown's polemic about the end of democracy to David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder's cultural analysis of neoliberal able-nationalism.[7] What most of these recent studies share is what I call "neoliberalocentrism"—evoking J. K. Gibson-Graham's critique of capitalocentrism—an a priori belief that neoliberalism has succeeded in its teleological march to global hegemony and now shapes everything from our national policies to the ways in which we relate to, feel, and understand our very selves.[8] While there is certainly a geographical, cultural, and historical specificity to our contemporary moment, neoliberalism is oftentimes evoked, as Arlene Dávila points out, as a shorthand for a confluence of events, developments, and structural and cultural changes that are a lot "more contradictory and uneven."[9] Such shorthand, Dávila warns us, applied "without any specificity about whether we may be referring to a particular ideology, or a technique of government, or a policy, or a financialization regime," not only weakens the forcefulness of our analyses and arguments, but also dilutes the efficacy of our critical interventions.[10]

In this response then, I would like to nudge neoliberalocentrist analytics towards an engagement with crip of color materialism, which the forum contributors already advance in various ways. By crip of color materialism, I reference the convergence of a historical materialist critical disability studies/crip theory/mad studies with critical race theory and queer of color critique.[11] Such an approach situates regimes of normalization and pathologization within the *longue durée* of the co-constitution of patriarchal racial capitalism and liberal democracy. It approaches structures of exclusion, dispossession, and death, and their concomitant ideas of human worth, vis-à-vis delegitimating assignments of intensity, instability, and irrationality. In so doing, it encourages scholars interested in questions of political economy to move from evoking David Harvey ad nauseam to instead follow those who advance indigenous, critical race, and postcolonial perspectives on political economy, such as Jodi Byrd, Cedric Robinson, and Malini Johar Schueller.[12] A crip of color materialist analytics returns to the question of rationality—one of the central tenets of liberal thought—to trouble its beginnings at the center of racial capitalism.

My larger argument is that neoliberalocentrist analytics face a number of problems: First, they often follow a dehistoricized hermeneutics that reinvests ontological forcefulness into well-critiqued binaries that extend racial capitalism's ideological dominance. In other words, anti-neoliberal critiques oftentimes reinforce dichotomies such as the public versus private and the political versus economic. Second, they choose to center the supposed novelty of certain phenomena over the longue durée of patriarchal, racial capitalism as it has become manifest most recently through liberal democratic systems. Third, neoliberalocentrist analytics tend to ascribe all current woes to neoliberalism because of an inability to think through the co-constitutive nature of various forms of governmentality (the police/carceral state, the rule of law/raison d'etat, etc.)—despite Foucault's emphasis that these are not incompatible systems but instead co-occurring rationalities characterized by "tensions, frictions, mutual incompatibilities, successful or failed adjustments, unstable mixtures, and so on."[13] While engaging with Jodi Melamed's writing in particular, my response is meant to serve as an addendum to all of the essays offered in this forum as a way to highlight the crip of color materialist analytics I have found most productive in understanding the contemporary materializations of the co-constitution of liberal democracy and racial capitalism.

Jodi Melamed's work has offered many productive avenues through which to approach (higher) education, institutions, and questions of difference, diversity, and inclusion as they are situated and become manifest in racial, neo/liberal capitalism.[14] As Melamed argues in this forum, neoliberalocentrist analyses often either ascribe to the Harvey-ite lament of the weakening of liberal democracy's bulwark institutions, such as the

university and the union, or follow the putatively Foucauldian biopolitical concern for the extension of "economic measures to every dimension of human existence."[15] Instead of a teleological heuristics of neoliberalocentrism, Melamed encourages scholars to investigate the amplification, the intensification, of already established "liberal modes of institutional power" under racial capitalism, to focus on the "internal and continuous" dynamics of "accumulation in political modernity."[16] Such a shift away from neoliberalism to racial capitalism as the overarching framework allows for more nuanced understandings of not just the continuities, but also the changes between past centuries and today. As Melamed argues, one possible insight might be the waning importance of citizenship as a determinant for dispossession, although contemporary contestations around resource exploitation and land claims, deportations, the "refugee crisis" in Europe, and many others might complicate this insight and certainly encourages more thorough studies of this nexus.

Nevertheless, the most important intervention that Melamed offers in her piece is to reconceptualize neoliberalism as intensification, as the amplification of "racial capitalist colonial modernity's shadow rationality" that is "the evil twin of its liberal political manifest reason."[17] In other words, the recent turn towards neoliberalocentrist analytics has one major, albeit unintended, bonus: it makes manifest the violent processes of liberal democracy in racial capitalism that can only function vis-à-vis exclusion, dispossession, and oppression because it has now become disturbing "even for centered white nationals."[18] What from an indigenous, postcolonial, and/or crip/queer of color perspective already appears as a structural legitimation of unjust resource allocation—or, in the words of Audra Simpson, theft—now becomes tangibly unsettling also for the colonizer.[19] The anxious states that neoliberalism has been found guilty of producing in white, Western subjects—and that affect theory and more recent strands of mad/disability studies have taken up—are not to be discounted.[20] But, instead of halting at an analysis of their particular manifestation, our analyses can be enriched by considering how this discomfort speaks to larger epistemological lacunae.

Furthermore, I would extend Melamed's insight by emphasizing the need to realize that what is claimed to have been newly marketized under neoliberalism, and how democracy has supposedly been de-politicized in order to be economized, reproduces dichotomies that have been foundational for racial capitalism's dominance —such as the separation of the political and economic, the public and the private. Critical race studies and women of color feminisms have long contested epistemological approaches that recenter such dichotomies, and yet they remain prominent in anti-neoliberal analytics. As Antonio Vázquez-Arroyo outlines, it is the depoliticization resulting from a conceptual differentiation between the political and economic in liberal democracy under racial capitalism that has created the framework for neoliberalization processes.[21] It would thus be imperative for analyses concerned with the role of political economy to avoid reproducing such polarizations and instead challenge naturalized dichotomies that ahistorically lament the marketization of specific practices and goods. There is very little work as yet that attempts to tease out in what ways the "contraction of democracy to liberalism" (Woods) that is an inherent tendency of liberal democracy under racial capitalism has produced the historical specificities within which we find ourselves faced with neoliberalization processes.[22]

I have been suggesting that crip of color materialism proves especially productive as an analytic approach for nuancing this particular nexus. Recall the frequency with which scholars describe (neo)liberalism as a rationality. Given the centrality of rationality for liberalism, which allowed for its "twin birth" with racial chattel slavery (Lorsurdo), a mad/critical disability studies centered through critical race theory and historical

materialism would be equipped to unsettle the basic logic of liberal capitalism's ableism that is articulated to racialized and gendered realities.[23] As Nirmala Erevelles has argued, the pathologization of those deemed property/non-citizens is foundational for liberalism's production of freedom through exclusion, oppression, dispossession, and death.[24] This pathologization functions via delegitimation by levels of intensity, instability, and irrationality, and has historically served as the justification for settler colonialism, genocide, slavery, imperialism, and the oppression and exploitation of the majority of the population, including indigenous people, people of color, women, people with disabilities, people who are trans/intersex/queer, the poor, the undocumented, and the incarcerated. Returning to and situating contemporary issues within the longue durée of patriarchal, racial capitalism through a mad studies lens of intensity, instability, and irrationality would highlight the overlapping techniques of government that we too often reduce to the homogenized adversary "neoliberalism."

Finally, I would challenge us to think more thoroughly about the claim that neoliberalism "just requires a techne," that it lacks a moralism of its own—the only truly distinguishing feature that justifies the "neo-" for Melamed, since she rightfully rejects dehistoricized claims about neoliberalism's "undoing" of democracy (re: Wendy Brown).[25] Neoliberalism seems to be characterized by a heightened proceduralism, a "reified sense as mere administration," but I would argue that such an intensification of biofinancialization to a "reductive logic of calculability" certainly offers its own moralism.[26] How else could we describe the austerity shaming of Greece by the troika? What would the otherwise extensively analyzed biopolitical regimes of self-care be but a renewed moralism of civilizational advancement and respectability? Do universities not continue to inculcate their students with a moralism of economic success as the good life? If we truly want to argue for the importance of a neoliberal analytic, we need to parse out more carefully how many of the "technes" of today are continuations of earlier modes of governance, how certain liberal tenets maintain their stranglehold on our conceptualizations of the good life, and in what ways the changes that we want to describe as neoliberal can help us understand the systems that shape our current moment in order to "write or imagine alternative knowledges, to act on behalf of alternative projects of communities," as Lisa Lowe reminds us.[27] It is the continued moralism of the rule of law that sustains the naturalized liberal democratic structures that depoliticize economic exploitation and manifest in discourses of individual responsibility, freedom, and democracy. If we are to challenge the current political-economic order, however we conceptualize it, we need to begin by returning to the foundations of racial capitalism and liberal democracy. This return will allow us to move from a mere concern with the intensification of economic exploitation to a foundational critique of the ideological structures that are currently perpetuated in most neoliberalocentrist critiques. It could offer an analytic that would allow us not only to critique current structures of inequality, but open the door to overcoming liberal imaginaries on the left.

Notes

1. Dylan Rodríguez, "Racial/Colonial Genocide and the 'Neoliberal Academy': In Excess of a Problematic," *American Quarterly* 64, no. 4 (2012): 812. ↩
2. Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 208. ↩
3. The 2014 American Studies Association conference featured a panel called 'Kill that Keyword?' in which neoliberalism seemed to be the most despised and communally acceptable keyword to excise from our scholarly lexicon. While many seemed to note the ubiquitization and accompanying diffusion of meaning that the term

neoliberalism had recently undergone, less attention was paid to the reasons for this development.

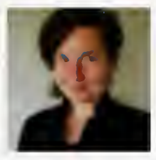
4. While there are too many studies employing neoliberalism as a critical analytic to list here, for the fields cited in the text see, for example, Jordan T. Camp, "'We Know This Place:' Neoliberal Racial Regimes and the Katrina Circumstance," *American Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (2009): 693–717; Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003); Julietta Hua and Neel Ahuja, "Chimpanzee Sanctuary: 'Surplus' Life and the Politics of Transspecies Care," *American Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (2013): 619–37; Robert McRuer, "Cripping Queer Politics, or the Dangers of Neoliberalism," *Scholar & Feminist Online* 10, no. 1/2 (2011–12); Rachel Greenwald Smith, *Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
5. By far the most cited is David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). A similar approach to neoliberalization processes in critical geography is advanced by Jamie Peck, *Constructions of Neoliberal Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Simon Springer, who is also a critical geographer but challenges some of the liberal tenets of Harvey's and Peck's school of thought, has most prominently nudged the study of neoliberalization processes into a conversation with anarchist theory. See Simon Springer, "Postneoliberalism?," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 47, no. 1 (2015): 5–17; Simon Springer, "Neoliberalism as Discourse: Between Foucauldian Political Economy and Marxian Poststructuralism," *Critical Discourse Studies* 9, no. 2 (2012): 133–47. I provide a much more nuanced discussion of these and other fields concerned with neoliberalism and neoliberalization processes in my dissertation, "A Mad Critique of Anti-Neoliberalism: Sanism in Contemporary Left Thinking and Scholarship on Political Economy."
6. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2008). While the study of biopolitics and governmentality has become a burgeoning field, there are fewer studies that engage with Foucault's thinking on neoliberalism (although, as I argue in my dissertation, his insights on neoliberalism should be quite central to the study of biopolitics). Among the former are works such as Nikolas Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); David T. Mitchell with Sharon L. Snyder, *The Biopolitics of Disability: Neoliberalism, Ablenationalism, and Peripheral Embodiment* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015); Melinda Cooper, *Life as Surplus: Biotechnology and Capitalism in the Neoliberal Era* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008). Among the latter there have been a few recent publications. See Vanessa Lemm and Miguel Vatter, eds., *The Government of Life: Foucault, Biopolitics, and Neoliberalism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014); Daniel Zamora and Michael C. Behrent, eds., *Foucault and Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2015).
7. Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015); Mitchell with Snyder, *The Biopolitics of Disability*.
8. J. K. Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); J. K. Gibson-Graham, *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It): A Feminist Critique of Political Economy* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996).
9. Arlene Dávila, "Locating Neoliberalism in Time, Space, and 'Culture,'" *American Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2014): 552.
10. Ibid.
11. The term "crip of color" has been used by several critical disability studies scholars,

most prominently in Jina B. Kim's work. See Jina B. Kim, "Anatomy of the City: Race, Infrastructure, and U.S. Fictions of Dependency" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2016) and Jina B. Kim, "Toward a Crip-of-Color Critique: Thinking with Minich's "Enabling Whom?"," *Lateral 6.1* (2017), http://csalateral.org/issue/6-1/forum-alt-humanities-critical-disability-studies-crip-of-color-critique-kim. For examples of texts that might be considered to fall under "crip of color," see: Chris Bell, ed., *Blackness and Disability: Critical Examinations and Cultural Interventions* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011); David J. Connor, Beth A. Ferri, and Subini A. Annamma, eds., *DisCrit: Disability Studies and Critical Race Theory in Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2015); Nirmala Erevelles, *Disability and Difference in Global Contexts: Enabling a Transformative Body Politic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Jin Haritaworn, *Queer Lovers and Hateful Others: Regenerating Violent Times and Places* (London: Pluto Press, 2015); Akemi Nishida, "Understanding Political Development Through an Intersectionality Framework: Life Stories of Disability Activists," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (2016); Sami Schalk, "Coming to Claim Crip: Disidentification With/in Disability Studies," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (2013); Louise Tam, "Neurasthenia Revisited: Psychologizing Precarious Labor and Migrant Status in Contemporary Discourses of Asian American Nervousness," *Disability and the Global South* 1, no. 2 (2014): 340–64. ↩

12. See Jodi Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (London: Zed Press, 1983); Malini Johar Schueller, *Locating Race: Global Sites of Post-Colonial Citizenship* (Albany: State University of New York, 2009). ↩
13. Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 21. ↩
14. Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011). ↩
15. Jodi Melamed, "Proceduralism, Predisposing, Poesis: Forms of Institutionality, In the Making." *Lateral* 5, no. 1 (2016), http://csalateral.org/issue/5-1/forum-alt-humanities-institutionality-making-melamed/. ↩
16. Ibid. ↩
17. Ibid. ↩
18. Ibid. ↩
19. Audra Simpson's comment during the roundtable discussion "The Misery of Settler Colonialism: Roundtable on Glen Coulthard's *Red Skin, White Masks* and Audra Simpson's *Mohawk Interruptus*" at the American Studies Association convention in 2015. ↩
20. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Tanja Aho, Liat Ben-Moshe, and Leon Hilton, eds., "Mad Futures: Culture, Politics, Affect," Special Forum in *American Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (forthcoming 2017): 291-302; Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Merri Lisa Johnson, "Bad Romance: A Crip Feminist Critique of Queer Failure," *Hypatia* 30, no. 1 (2015): 251–67; Brenda A. LeFrancois, Robert Menzies, and Geoffrey Reaume, eds., *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2013); Rachel Greenwald Smith, *Affect and American Literature in the Age of Neoliberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). ↩
21. Antonio Y. Vásquez-Arroyo, "Liberal Democracy and Neoliberalism: A Critical Juxtaposition," *New Political Science* 30, no.2 (2008): 127–59. ↩
22. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 229. ↩

23. Domenico Losurdo, *Liberalism: A Counter-History*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2011), 302. ↩
24. Nirmala Erevelles, "(Im)Material Citizens: Cognitive Disability, Race, and the Politics of Citizenship," in *Foundations of Disability Studies*, ed. Matthew Wappett and Katrina Arndt (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 145–76. ↩
25. Melamed, "Proceduralism, Predisposing, Poesis." ↩
26. Ibid. ↩
27. Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 208. ↩

Bio



Tanja Aho

Tanja Aho is a PhD candidate in American Studies at the University at Buffalo, where she is completing a dissertation on the racialized pathologization of states of intensity in anti-neoliberal discourses, as they can be found in radical left manifestos, so-called neoliberal literature, pop psychology blogs, and the sharing economy. Her other work on madness/disability, political economy, and television has been published in several anthologies and is forthcoming in *American Quarterly* and the *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*. In 2015 Tanja Aho served as the interim managing editor of the *Disability Studies Quarterly* and she is currently the chair of the ASA's Critical Disability Studies Caucus and a 2017-18 NY Public Humanities fellow.

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Jodi Melamed, "Response to Tanja Aho and Leland Tabares: Madness and Parainstitutionality," *Lateral 6.1* (2017).

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Forum: Emergent Critical Analytics for Alternative Humanities
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Response to Tanja Aho and Leland Tabares: Madness and Parainstitutionality

Jodi Melamed

ABSTRACT

Tanja Aho's response both criticizes a scholarly trend she identifies as "neoliberalcentrist analytics" for presuming neoliberalism's homogeny, hegemony, and totality and introduces a new critical analytic, "crip of color materialism," which Aho describes as "the convergence of a historical materialist critical disability studies/crip theory/mad studies with critical race theory and queer of color critique." This double move allows Aho to foreground the question of reason: In contrast to the bad tendencies of neoliberalcentric scholars to make neoliberalism's dissemination of economic reason into an all-purpose explainer for everything from state violence to affective experiences of selves, Aho asks us to consider the assigning of reason and unreason—that is, normalization and pathologization—as continuous political economic processes in the long durée of liberal racial capitalism. I am intrigued by thinking liberal rationality as ablism (so long as its racialized and gendered violences are foregrounded) and imagine Aho's interest in "intensity, instability, and irrationality" as modes of critical disruption will prove generative. But we will have to wait for future scholarship from Aho to get a thicker sense of what kinds of thinking a "crip of color materialist analytics" will generate.

I am grateful for Aho's gentle criticism of my claim that, in contrast to the moralism of liberal modes of institutionality, which justify inequality by sorting human groups according to their worthy/unworthiness, neoliberal modes of institutionality, "require just techne," a connection to "the human" through "mere numeracy, virtualization, and technification." Aho is right: moralism is not evacuated from deployments of financialization, whether we are talking about austerity regimes or the dismantling of Dodd-Frank. Rather, that misfire comes from trying to put my head around what I've since decided to call "administrative violence," the use of commensurability, abstraction, quantification, and other banal routines of nominally democratic governance to secure impunity for the violence that capital accumulation requires.

Leland Tabares productively complexifies our thinking of institutional environments, and the academy as an institution, by noting that institutions are never singular or determinate; rather, our perception of the academy as an institution is scalular and contextual: "Depending on how close or how far back we want to scale our perception of the academy as an institution, we can always arrive at institutionality from a different contextual frame (e.g., the old liberal humanist university, the corporate university, etc.)." Tabares's primary interest is at the level of "para-institutions . . . institutions that are peripheral to the academy yet which directly overlap with it." His chief examples are

corporate donors to universities (Apple), yet he also mentions families, religious youth groups, activist media outlets, and digital media subcultures, para-institutional contexts that students and others inhabit in addition to the university. He mishears my call to perform collectivity excessively and disruptively within the university (for example, throwing a monkey wrench into administrative discourses of "diversity" by insisting that the term include people who do not go to college) as an elitist call to institute radical collectives. (This is understandable, given the conventional readings of one of my source texts, *The Undercommons*.) Yet this criticism leads Leland to articulate a concern that interests me too: the question of how to unleash "the political potential of critique" outside of universities, so that critique can make a difference (what kind?) particularly in the academy's para-institutions.

Leland notes that he is interested in rethinking the bounds of institutions and bringing in their intersectional and scalular contexts "so that the capacity for radicalism developed in one institutional context can be made legible in another." For me, this brings to mind the way that the national media reduced the student movements' deep politicization of ongoing settler colonialism and the afterlives of slavery (which I refer to in the beginning of my Forum contribution) to "campus issues." To me, Leland's call to develop interpersonal collaborations across institutional contexts and to promote more thick and dialogical ways of academics interacting with non-academic community members (for him, exemplified in sociological methods committed to social justice work in Asian American studies) sounds like a good thing to do, but not because "it disrupts the bounds of the academy." (Roderick Ferguson's work might ask us to ask how it allows the academy to penetrate and re-order non-academic space even more.) Rather, I think the example of the new campus protests—which are not overly citational, but clearly flower from earlier social movement knowledges (which make legible the epistemic violences of white supremacist education, the coloniality of American universities, access as reparations, etc.)—emphasizes the fact that radical critique comes *into* college campuses on the wings of social movements, more often than it is born there. Can analyzing the complex contextual and scalular nature of institutions—like the academy—help us to be more specific about its modes of power, so we can see the vectors of its corporate power, as well as the ways it serves as an institutional base (however precarious) for minoritized communities, like the Asian American youth groups to which Leland refers? Yes! So I like attention to complexity, not to disrupt institutional bounds and "overcome" them, but to pay more attention to the contact zones that cross in and through and around these overlapping institutional contexts, so we can be wary of appropriation and attentive to new possibilities of relations that emerge within them.

I am grateful for the energies and the insights of these two scholars. Both of their work demonstrate that thinking about "institutionality" rather than just analyzing institutions is necessary for catching on to the complexity of contested and conflictual material social processes, as these predispose the continuation of dominant epistemic and material conditions and open to new makings.

Bio



Jodi Melamed

Jodi Melamed is Associate Professor of English and Africana Studies at Marquette University. Her current research aims to provide an anti-racist critique of contemporary capitalisms and an anti-capitalist critique of historically dominant U.S. anti-racisms. She is the author of *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (University of Minnesota Press, 2011), and her scholarship has appeared in

interdisciplinary journals and edited collections including *American Quarterly*, *American Literature*, *Social Text*, *African American Review*, *Critical Ethnic Studies*, *Strange Affinities: The Sexual and Gender Politics of Comparative Racialization* (Duke University Press, 2011), and *Keywords for American Cultural Studies, Second Edition* (New York University Press, 2014). Her next book project, *Dispossession by Administration*, investigates the financialization of racial colonial capitalism and the contemporary apotheosis of proceduralism as a mode of dispossession. Currently, she serves on the National Council of the American Studies Association.

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Andrew Wood, "Review of *Hegemony, Mass Media, and Cultural Studies: Properties of Meaning, Power, and Value in Cultural Production* by Sean Johnson Andrews (Rowman & Littlefield)," *Lateral 6.1* (2017).

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Book Reviews
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Review of *Hegemony, Mass Media, and Cultural Studies: Properties of Meaning, Power, and Value in Cultural Production* by Sean Johnson Andrews (Rowman & Littlefield)

Andrew Wood

ABSTRACT Sean Johnson Andrews has produced an engaging text of multifaceted value. His work, particularly the opening chapters, provides a concise history of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), the (early) Frankfurt School Critical Theory, and the Political Economy of Communication (PEC). Although the histories and notable figureheads of these schools will be broadly familiar to most scholars working in the realm of cultural studies, these opening chapters would be an excellent introduction to the field for either a general readership or students. Indeed, this would make a good textbook in many contexts.

Hegemony, Mass Media, and Cultural Studies: Properties of Meaning, Power, and Value in Cultural Production. By Sean Johnson Andrews. London, U.K.: Rowman & Littlefield International, Ltd, 2017, 239 pp (paperback) ISBN 978-1-78348-556-7. Printed in the U.S., U.S. List: $39.95

Sean Johnson Andrews has produced an engaging text of multifaceted value. His work, particularly the opening chapters, provides a concise history of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), the (early) Frankfurt School Critical Theory, and the Political Economy of Communication (PEC). Although the histories and notable figureheads of these schools will be broadly familiar to most scholars working in the realm of cultural studies, these opening chapters would be an excellent introduction to the field for either a general readership or students. Indeed, this would make a good textbook in many contexts.

The more scholarly and discerning reader will notice, however, that although his primary theoretical intervention is to attempt a conversation between these three methodological frameworks for the study of mass media (a useful intervention to be sure), he does at times seem to flatten out these schools of thought. Of course, it may be unreasonable for a singular book to deeply explore all of the various contributions to (primarily Anglo-American) cultural studies, yet Andrews gives the distinct impression that both CCCS and PEC represent coherent and holistic narratives, and hence ignores the very different directions taken by, for instance a Paul Gilroy or an Angela McRobbie, as opposed to the vaunted Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall.

Despite this issue, the bulk of the text offers a compelling investigation into the corporate control of commodified culture, expressed starkly at the opening of the text by Andrews's succinct claim that "someone else probably owns a significant portion of your consciousness" (1). That is, many of our cultural referents, be they the films, television or

radio programming, music, etc. many or us quote, refer to, enjoy, or daydream about on a daily basis, are mostly owned by a handful of multinational corporations. This hegemonic control (and following Gramsci, the necessary reification and enforcement of this hegemony), Andrews argues, of *most* cultural outlets by these corporations undermines the more democratic possibilities of technological expansion. This "conglomeration" is also nothing new, but indeed Andrews argues in the case of television and radio "was present almost from the beginning" (113). The particular argument Andrews advances regarding corporate ownership of such large swathes of consciousness is among the most startling, but also most convincing, aspects in his text.

Yet, for a text ostensibly about how this hegemonic control of culture affects our consciousness (both collective and individual), there is very little discussion given to what particular ideological beliefs and constructions are being reinforced. We have hints of dominant consumerism, as well as the often racialized, classed, and gendered components of it, but what of the broader elements of liberal ideology (e.g. individualism) so often attached to capital? The closest we get to this in Andrews's text is a brief discussion of Lukács and his critique of capital's reification, most especially when subjectivities themselves are intimately attached to the commodity (131-137).

Andrews is at his best when describing specific histories that support his overall claims regarding hegemony and cultural meaning making. These histories of the minstrel show and its afterlives, Christmas celebrations, Shakespearean performances, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* should be of interest to both a general and a scholarly readership. Additionally, his attention to the changes brought to cultural production and (particularly) consumption by big data and the commodification of YouTube and user-generated content is an interesting and useful intervention.

The biggest question I have following Andrews's text is, where are the possibilities for resistance? Despite his attention to controversies of ownership surrounding sampling in hip-hop and mash-up musical forms, surely there are other tactics, perhaps in less straightforward ways, in which artists and consumers have resisted corporate hegemonic ownership of cultural commodities. What are some of the other ways in which the "monopoly capitalism" of copyright laws can be resisted (Andrews 44, 45, 63, 66)?

He mentions fan fiction (and other articulations of fan culture), for example, as an outlet for the creative play with corporate owned entities, but doesn't deeply consider whether these fan outlets and spaces are resistant, reifying, contested, consensus or dissensus based, neutral, or problematic. Instead, he prefers to simply refer to them as "valorizing," and involved in the meaning-making feedback loop of cultural production and consumption. Does the interaction with a commodity culture (or cultural commodity) by fans, or audiences more broadly, move in directions other than valorization? Are there instances, for example, in which audiences may indeed *de*-value or undermine a given work or commodity culture more broadly?

The biggest struggle, he argues, for counterhegemonic movements is to produce content at the same "temperature" and perceived legitimacy as the big corporations (Andrews 91). This claim is surely correct, given all of the obstacles of access, capital, and technology faced. Yet, somehow these counterhegemonic moves are still made, even if at a lower, hidden, or obscured level. The biggest and most hopeful example Andrews provides is the collectively produced online resource Wikipedia, which has effectively undermined competing for-profit encyclopedias like Britannica. What can we make of this persistence in resistance? Can we think about something like do-it-yourself (DIY) productions as resisting the hegemonic mode of commodified culture? What about the looping back of non-commodity productions (e.g. Banksy), that then become commodified and sold

(though not copy-written) without the consent of the artist(s)? Is a discussion of surplus or excess, so often discussed in political economic theory, also relevant to an investigation of hegemonic, commodified culture? These questions are left largely unanswered and open for the readers to explore.

Bio

Andrew Wood

Andrew J. Wood is an educator, writer, activist, and a Ph.D. candidate in political theory at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Influenced by an eclectic amalgamation of philosophy, political thought, music, poetics, economics, literature, and aesthetics, his work broadly addresses political imagination and radical social change through visual, sonic, and affective registers often disregarded by traditional social scientific paradigms.

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Daniella Mascarenhas, "Review of *Speculative Blackness: The Future of Race in Science Fiction* by André M. Carrington (University of Minnesota Press)," *Lateral 6.1* (2017).

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Book Reviews
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Review of *Speculative Blackness: The Future of Race in Science Fiction* by André M. Carrington (University of Minnesota Press)

Daniella Mascarenhas

ABSTRACT André Carrington's 'Speculative Blackness' is a novel approach to the consumption of race representation in media. Carrington explores how Blackness is manufactured, consumed, and transformed through the speculative fiction genre across multiple 20th and 21st century mediums. Traditional media of comic books and television shows reveal the marginalized status of Black figures however, these media do not exist in a vacuum. The consumption of speculative fiction is a transformative process for the original content, which consequentially produces amateur media due to a long-established history of fan interaction. Black representation is characterized as the exception, not the rule, in traditional production, but fan consumption reconfigures these notions. Ultimately, Carrington's work is an innovative dialogue regarding a genre that creates worlds speculating on what could be. Speculative fiction breaks down preexisting notions of our reality and creates worlds with entirely new expectations and interactions. With the creative liberty of the genre, Carrington casts Black representation as a consumed media but also an imaginative effort.

Speculative Blackness: The Future of Race in Science Fiction. By André M. Carrington. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2016, 282 pp. (paperback) ISBN 978 0 8166 7896 9. US List: $25.00.

André Carrington's *Speculative Blackness* is a novel approach to the consumption of race representation in media. He demonstrates how fan interaction is equally as important as media production. Carrington explores how Blackness is manufactured, consumed, and transformed through the speculative fiction genre across multiple 20th and 21st century mediums. Traditional media of comic books and television shows reveal the marginalized status of Black figures however, these media do not exist in a vacuum. The consumption of speculative fiction is a transformative process for the original content, which consequentially produces amateur media due to a long-established history of fan interaction. Black representation is characterized as the exception, not the rule, in traditional production, but fan consumption reconfigures these notions.

Carrington is encumbered with the task of situating fan fiction as a legitimate endeavor. Fan-produced works document how audiences consume and translate media into influential societal markers. Carrington uses an example that demonstrates the subtle interaction of race, privilege, power, and representation in the context of media production by examining self-publishing American science fiction clubs originating in the 1930s. Carl Brandon, the Black persona of a White author, published multiple fan fictions that were greeted positively and indicated a shift toward Black inclusion until it was revealed he was merely a White invention. However, this hoax was not without merit. Carrington shows (by historically tracing publications, correspondence, and events) that constant audience interaction shaped how fans and publishers alike represented Blackness and legitimized Black contributions to speculative fiction. Audience interaction represents the persistent and strategic application of counter power against the White

cooptation of a Black fan base by opening the textual field produced, in part, through Brandon's work, to audience commentary and contest, and through the continued production of science fiction by black authors (despite the narrow room available to challenge White establishment authors).

Carrington's last chapter again touches on the transformative importance of consumption through online fan fiction featured on *Remember Us*, an archive featuring characters of color. Clearly, Carrington's project is bolstered by a large and prolific body of work. The author, however, only recognizes the existence of Black fan fiction and not the measure of its influence. Through no fault of his own, Carrington is limited by research into a new field that lacks metrics and methods to measure the reach and influence of fan-generated media. Traditional media has trackable societal influence (fan fiction, sales, progressive publishing), but how influential are self-published fan creations? With no method of tracking their dissemination, their influence is questionable. This critique is not levied to undermine Carrington's efforts, but to prompt future research into methods that can be refined and measured (i.e. tracking downloads, counting page hits, sales of self-published e-books, etc.). The existence of Black-centric fan bases is telling of a racially shifting audience, but how this audience redefines itself, within itself, is undiagnosed.

Carrington also looks at the process of media consumption in various versions of *Star Trek* and comic book universes. Critically, Carrington admits this project "emerges out of a distinctly African American and feminist practice of scholarship as well as my experience as a fan" (17). The research into Blackness and speculative fiction makes thorough use of several examples that are markedly female. For instance, Carrington looks at characters in the Marvel Comics universe, focusing heavily on the character Storm. He explicates her uniquely African origin story, Storm's interaction with non-white characters, and her diversion from traditional Black appearance. The influence of Black Male Marvel characters is discussed in a footnote in the third chapter.

This feminist approach is repeated when Carrington analyses the *Icon* series from DC Comic's affiliate Milestone Media. Augustus Freeman IV, as hero Icon, has a distinctively Black origin story as an alien lifeform raised by an enslaved, Black mother. The comic is told from the perspective of Icon's 15-year-old companion Raquel Ervin (superhero Rocket), whose urban upbringing is contrasted with Icon's experience. Much of the chapter focuses on Rocket's desire to be a writer like Toni Morrison, her teen pregnancy, and her role as a Black, female superhero. Carrington discusses how the depiction of Rocket's Blackness, specifically her appearance and interests, and how crossover elements from other comics helped introduce a White readership to a specifically Black endeavor. Additionally, Rocket's Black female representation is contrasted with Icon who is positioned as her foil in backstory and demeanor. As Carrington adheres to a feminist approach in his analysis of comics, Black femininity is vitally juxtaposed against the prevalence of Black male characters.

The author also discusses Black, male representation in the *Star Trek* episode "Far Beyond the Stars." Here, Black captain Ben Sisko is transported back to the 1950s as a science fiction writer who, though important to his writing firm, is systematically excluded in the firm's representation. Carrington skillfully looks at the teleplay, the television episode, and the novelization of the episode to connect the future culture of the *Deep Space Nine* universe and the 19th Century, revealing the present-day hope that future generations will not be encumbered by racial bigotry. Shifting back to a feminist approach but staying within the *Star Trek* series, Carrington discusses how issues regarding work, presence, and representation begin with Nichelle Nichols' casting as Lieutenant Uhura in the first *Star Trek* television series. Nichols took on a powerful, commanding position in the show, yet was billed as a reoccurring player rather than a permanent character. However, she

still exerted creative control over her Black representation in a White context. As Carrington focuses on how these representations make concrete differences, he notes how Nichols' influence as a Black woman made real life strides through her connection with NASA, reinforcing his point that speculative fiction has greater real world consequences.

Ultimately, Carrington's work is an innovative dialogue regarding a genre that creates worlds speculating on what could be. This project is only the beginning of an endeavor with a vast frontier of possibilities that have been, up to this point, marginally explored. Speculative fiction breaks down preexisting notions of our reality and creates worlds with entirely new expectations and interactions. With the creative liberty of the genre, Carrington casts Black representation as a consumed media but also an imaginative effort. This approach to analyzing racial representation calls for further examinations that can be updated as quickly as fan fiction can be produced.

Bio



Daniella Mascarenhas

Daniella Mascarenhas is an ABD doctoral candidate of political science at the University of Houston. Her dissertation examines the political theory of punishment, specifically looking at how American private prisons are incompatible with the prevailing justifications for punishment in a social contract. She has accrued teaching experience in political theory, federal government, and local government at Lone Star Community College and University of Houston. Other research interests include comparative political parties, political institutions, social contract theory, and American constitutionalism.

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Stephanie N. Berberick, "Review of *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* by Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou (Polity)," *Lateral 6.1* (2017).

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Book Reviews
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Review of *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* by Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou (Polity)

Stephanie N Berberick

ABSTRACT "Dispossession: The Performative in the Political" is an interdisciplinary cultural text published from the conversations between Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou. "Dispossession" brings the reader to key questions within philosophical inquiry including: What does it mean to be human? Which bodies are vulnerable as a result of normalizing regimes? How does precarity shift over time? What does occupation mean in regards to discipline and resistance? Which bodies are allowed to have a place and what does demanding a place do to dislocated bodies? Can non-normative people be recognized by the state without incorporation to propriety politics? How is agency complicated by the inter-related nature of life in the everyday?

Dispossession: The Performative in the Political. By Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou. Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013. 211 pp. (paperback) ISBN 978-0-7456-5381-5. US List $19.95.

Dispossession: The Performative in the Political is an interdisciplinary cultural text published from the conversations between Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou. *Dispossession* brings the reader to key questions within philosophical inquiry including: What does it mean to be human? Which bodies are vulnerable as a result of normalizing regimes? How does precarity shift over time? What does occupation mean in regards to discipline *and* resistance? Which bodies are allowed to have a place and what does demanding a place do to dislocated bodies? Can non-normative people be recognized by the state without incorporation to propriety politics? How is agency complicated by the inter-related nature of life in the everyday?

The aforementioned questions are arrived at following the working through of the central question of the text: What is it to be dispossessed? Butler and Athanasiou move through dispossession as it relates to history and contemporary cultural moments to investigate this question. Examples are given of indigenous suffering via the separation from land and sovereignty rights under the auspices of global capitalism in sites such as the Niger Delta, Ecuador, and Bolivia. The reader is taken to Palestine; to the invasion of British colonialists in Australia; to Abu Ghraib. Dispossession, they show time and again, is very much a result of state-inflicted violence under "neoliberal governmentality" that "invests" "in the production and management of forms of life" by allowing some people to live at the expense of another's "slow death" (31–32). Yet Butler and Athanasiou are also careful to discuss dispossession as interpersonal as well, ultimately outlining dispossession as something that one already is and something that one becomes. An important distinction is made between "being" dispossessed—a result of being "interdependent beings whose pleasure and suffering depend from the start on a sustained social world, a sustaining environment" (4)—and "becoming or being made dispossessed"—the "ensuing, derivative

condition of enforced deprivation of land, rights, livelihood, desire, or modes of belonging" (5).

To "be" dispossessed is to exist in a world where a person is not immune to the actions and words of another and thus the self can be altered irrevocably through contact with another, through feelings such as "grief, love, rage, ambition, and ecstasy" (4). To "become" dispossessed is to have something violently taken or withheld, such as in Palestine where Israel's military occupation "destroys lives, homes, communities, lands, and infrastructural conditions of livelihood and sociability" (180). Butler and Athanasiou also nuance dispossession through illustrating how it leads to communal, political action. They do not romanticize dispossession, but do take great care to illustrate the connectedness of various aspects of life in the everyday whereby tragedy can lead to collective response (and the applicability of theory to these situations).

Dispossession: The Performative in the Political is heavy and thought-provoking, weaving between multiple nuances of being and becoming dispossessed while returning the reader to ongoing theoretical debates. Butler and Athanasiou pull from an impressive canon of thinkers, such as Adorno, Fanon, Foucault, Levinas, Marx, and Spivak to name a few. Yet one cannot help but notice the lack of references to scholarship from emerging thinkers who may write from the places and spaces of dispossession discussed in the text. Additionally, Butler and Athanasiou employ the canon of late nineteenth and twentieth century thinkers almost casually, giving little space to unpack the work they pull from, aside from an inconsistent and brief description of the scholar's particular theoretical position. Thus, to fully engage with this text as an independent or junior scholar may mean committing to external research that not all are able to complete given roadblocks such as inaccessibility to materials or time restrictions. This begs the question: How accessible is the text to people most affected by regulatory regimes that seek to dispossess in the name of capital, property, and propriety?

Conversely, Butler and Athanasiou offer scholars of all educational levels and abilities something quite refreshing: they illustrate that no theory is ever complete, and conversation leads to more nuanced, thoughtful, and reflexive intellectual work. This is certainly a blow to the very neoliberal regimes that Butler and Athanasiou take to task, as their dialogue in *Dispossession* works against the individualistic nature of many academies and cultures. There are many instances in the text where Butler and Athanasiou trouble the thoughts of their comrade through asking for clarification and sometimes offering points of contention. Athanasiou, for example, responds to Butler's request for clarification regarding territorial dispossession and the politics of staying still or moving by stating "that the facile equation of agency with the capacity to move needs to be problematized also from the perspective of disability studies. Such a reductive construal of agency as moving, mobilizing, or standing up privileges mobility and thus reiterates the presumption that agency belongs properly to certain regimes of bodily morphology and recognizability" (22). The respectful and astute debate between two esteemed and accomplished scholars shows readers that theory is best when it is in motion, moving between minds and growing as it shifts. *Dispossession* also shows that theory—like the scholar who pens it—changes, such as when Butler critiques their own work in *Bodies that Matter*, asking "who was this person who held these views" (51)?

Ultimately, *Dispossession* offers a great deal to readers. Through watching a conversation unfold over two-hundred pages, the reader is taken into the birthing process of theory and reminded time and again that scholarship is better when it is not created in isolation but instead born of reflexive, responsible, and reciprocal dialogue. Perhaps most importantly, the text breathes new life into what some may consider antiquated debates around subjectivity, agency, community, and the nature of humankind, illustrating that

there is much work left to be done in a world where it often seems that capital trumps compassionate collectivity.

Bio



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Stephanie N. Berberick is doctoral candidate in the College of Communications at The Pennsylvania State University who is also minoring in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Berberick is published in International Journal of Communication, tripleC: Communication, Capitalism, & Critique, Feminist Media Studies, and The New York Sociologist. She has presented her research at national and international conferences.

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Lindsay Garcia, "Review of *After Art* by David Joselit (Princeton)," *Lateral 6.1* (2017).

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Book Reviews
Issue 6.1 (Spring 2017)

Review of *After Art* by David Joselit (Princeton)

Lindsay Garcia

ABSTRACT David Joselit's slim volume "After Art" offers multiple intriguing frameworks to analyze art in the present-day globalized art world. After Art backs away from the traditional approach of artist intent and production and looks at what happens to images once they are attached to the networks that circulate them. Instead of proselytizing individual or even original artworks, Joselit champions images that are constantly reproduced and remediated by artists and architects such as Tania Bruguera, Ai Weiwei, Sherrie Levine, Matthew Barney, Le Corbusier, and Rem Koolhaus.

After Art. By David Joselit. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012, 136pp. (Hardcover) ISBN 1400845149. US List: $25.00

David Joselit's slim volume *After Art* offers multiple intriguing frameworks to analyze art in the present-day globalized art world. *After Art* backs away from the traditional approach of artist intent and production and looks at what happens to images once they are attached to the networks that circulate them. Instead of proselytizing individual or even original artworks, Joselit champions images that are constantly reproduced and remediated by artists and architects such as Tania Bruguera, Ai Weiwei, Sherrie Levine, Matthew Barney, Le Corbusier, and Rem Koolhaus. In many respects a sequel to Joselit's 2007 book, *Feedback: Television Against Democracy*, the collection of essays at hand was developed out of a series of three lectures entitled "States of Form" delivered at the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University in 2010. *After Art* is fast-paced and deploys numerous theoretical concepts in rapid succession to convincingly articulate Joselit's main argument: "images produce power" (xvi) by circulating like currency. Joselit shows how instead of being "discrete objects" (94), images engage in socio-political issues by way of traveling across networks. The more nodes the images connect to, the more power they have. According to Joselit, we should seek out ways to harness this power "affirmatively (and aggressively) rather than negatively or with shame" (93).

After Art comes at a time when history of capitalism has become an emergent field in the humanities.[1] While there are some examples of capitalist exploration in art and architectural history and criticism, such as Pamela Lee's book *Forgetting the Art World* (2012), which explores the globalization, movement, and migration of art, and work by architectural scholars such as Peggy Deamer, *After Art* presents some of the first economically-inclined frameworks for articulating how images exist in the present day. Joselit's interdisciplinary book also engages in a number of smaller conversations with mobility studies, critical Internet studies, numismatics, cultural diplomacy, democracy, the commons, and museum studies.

Joselit's engagement with these larger conversations about economics and globalization contribute to his supposition that, despite popular opinion, images are not "derivative", "dumb," or "deceptive" (xiii-xvi); instead, they "possess vast power through their capacity

for replication, remediation, and dissemination at variable velocities" (xiv). The word *image* replaces *art* and is defined as "a quantum of visual content…that can assume a variety of formats" (xv). Essentially, the quality, medium, and scale of an image can change, and images can be remediated and reproduced ad infinitum. Joselit finds the analytic of *medium* to be outdated and instead uses *format*, for each image can embody a number of different formats that "establish a pattern of links or connections" (55) in its lifetime through the networks of contemporary culture, economics, and politics.

Joselit's claim that formats build connections leads him to specify how art builds international diplomacy, by setting up the dialectic between the neoliberal and the fundamentalist view, a political conflict that is furthered by the globalized art trade. The neoliberal side represents the free market approach, epitomized by events such as Art Basel, which aim to create art as a form of currency, or a universal that can transverse borders and cultures with ease. In contrast, the fundamentalist approach calls for art and architecture to be "rooted to a specific place" (3) such that art and architecture belong to a particular location usually where birthed. Such a dialectic is set up to move to a discussion of the informational versus the aesthetic value of an art object. Ultimately, Joselit rejects fundamentalism all together when he writes that "it is saturation through mass circulation —the status of being *everywhere at once* rather than belonging to a single place—that now produces value for and through images" (16).[2]

A heavy critique of museums pervades the text. Museums stockpile artworks and accumulate funds from trustees and donors. Joselit goes so far as to call this practice "a massive money laundering operation" (71). He also critiques museums for attempting to produce an image of diversity and multiplicity while at the same time branding themselves with one image, like the Guggenheim Bilbao. The author's solution to these issues is *global image justice*, which means "making cultural politics a serious dimension of foreign policy" (21) and "redistribut[ing] *image* wealth" (23). One especially controversial claim is his request for European and other Western foreign ministries to give grants to the Global South to build modern cultural infrastructures that allow for the transmission of art and cultural objects from the Western world to the developing world. Joselit sees this as a democratization of images, but does not consider the more troubling aspects of this process that are rooted in cultural colonialism, homogenization, and Western exceptionalism.

Joselit also discusses at length his catch phrase "Epistemology of Search," which is a way for an artwork to create value based on its "searchability" (58), connectivity, and ability to reaggregate and connect to other information and social forces. Joselit argues that original art doesn't exist anymore. Instead, art is made through "reframing, capturing, reiterating, and documenting" (56) based on the "aesthetics of the search engine" (58). The book provides examples of architectural spaces and works of art that expose figure-ground relationships, fold content into formal structures, and connect to networks. He sees this new analytical toolkit as a shift in methodological approach from "object-based aesthetics" to "networks aesthetics premised on the emergence of form from populations of images" (43). Instead of tapping into traditional analytical approaches, Joselit does not believe in assigning meaning to art at all because it gives value to the work and enhances its ability to become a commodity on the free market.

The theories and information provided in this book will be useful to those interested in developing new methodological approaches to art history, media studies, and visual culture as well as advertisers, marketers, activists, and artists who intend to bring powerful messages using images to a large number of viewers through social, economic, and political networks. I find it rather strange, however, that a book that is calling for the "reframing, capturing, reiterating, and documenting" of images and an Epistemology of

Search has chosen to present itself in the most traditional of all formats: the book. While undoubtedly, a book connects to a multiplicity of networks, spectators, and socio-political forces, it is surprising that there is no interactive, creative online version of this text which could aggregate the information provided into various formats, configurations, and linked connections. Perhaps this is a project for emerging scholars who wish to take on a digital humanities project in Scalar or another tool.

Notes

1. Some recent examples of scholars who engage with the discourses of capitalism include historians, theorists, and activists, such as: Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2016); *Sven Beckert, Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Vintage, 2015); Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2013) Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015); Sarah Ahmed, "Affective Economies," *Social Text* 22.2 (2004):117-139.
2. Joselit developed this concept based on John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff's term "ethno-commodities." John L. Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Ethnicity, Inc.* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009): 20. This omnipresent quality of images is what Joselit terms "buzz" (16).

Bio



Lindsay Garcia

Lindsay Garcia is a video, performance, and social practice artist as well as a PhD Candidate in American Studies and an Equality Lab Fellow at the College of William & Mary. Her artwork thematically engages with queer intersectional feminism, politics and current events, nonhuman animals and nature, human structures, and waste. Her dissertation explores how border and boundary crossings of pest animals and pesticides reveal issues of environmental justice from a queer, posthumanist, visual studies perspective. Garcia received a BFA in Sculpture from Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), an MFA in Interdisciplinary Visual Arts from SUNY Purchase, an MA in Contemporary Art from Sotheby's Institute of Art, and an MA in American Studies from the College of William and Mary in 2016. Her MA Thesis "Capitalist Architecture in a Posthumanist World" won the Arts and Sciences Distinguished Thesis Award in the Humanities at the College of William & Mary. At SUNY Purchase, she won the Outstanding MFA Award, and at RISD, she won the Senior Sculpture Prize. Garcia has exhibited her artwork in New York (NY), Philadelphia (PA), Washington, D.C., San Jose (CA), Richmond (VA), Providence (RI), Wooster (OH), Torrington (CT), and Bergen (NJ). Garcia has published in ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance and Lateral.

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Arnold L. Farr, "Review of *Critical Marxism in Mexico: Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez and Bolivar Echeverría* (Haymarket)," *Lateral 6.1* (2017).

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Book Reviews
Issue 6.1 (Spring 2017)

Review of *Critical Marxism in Mexico: Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez and Bolivar Echeverría* by Stefan Gandler (Haymarket)

Arnold L Farr

ABSTRACT With this book, Stefan Gandler has made important contributions to the study of Marxism and critical social theory in Mexico. Regarding the first contribution, this book expands the theoretical tools and insights within the canon of Marxist thought. It does this by exposing American and European Marxists to two very important thinkers who have not yet been given much attention by Marxists outside of the Latin American context. The second contribution lies in Gandler's exegetical work on the texts of these two thinkers, Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez and Bolívar Echeverría.

Critical Marxism in Mexico: Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez and Bolivar Echeverría. By Stefan Gandler. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2016, 467 pp. (paperback) ISBN 1608466337. US List: $36.00.

With this book Stefan Gandler has made important contributions to the study of Marxism and critical social theory in Mexico. Regarding the first contribution, this book expands the theoretical tools and insights within the canon of Marxist thought. It does this by exposing American and European Marxists to two very important thinkers who have not yet been given much attention by Marxists outside of the Latin American context.

The second contribution lies in Gandler's exegetical work on the texts of these two thinkers, Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez and Bolívar Echeverría. Gandler's book then is a useful commentary and critical analysis for theorists in Latin America and beyond. In *toto* this book serves as an important corrective to the Eurocentric nature of western and orthodox canonical Marxism. Running through the book is the problem of the location of theory. By "location of theory" I am suggesting (as I think Gandler is) that geographical, social, and political context plays a role in the development of theory. The social and political conditions, as well as the forms of domination against which a thinker struggles have an impact on the way in which theory develops. Hence, Gandler along with the two thinkers who are the subject matter of this book offer a challenge to the traditional Eurocentric notion of universalism. Gandler tries to show that the idea of universalism that has been passed down from European philosophy is an abstract universalism that does not adequately apply to specific situations and contexts.

Even the reading of Marx or any thinker is a located reading that reflects the situatedness of the reader. This does not open the door for a mindless form of relativism, but rather, it creates space for a plurality of voices in the midst of the struggle for a transformed world. Each voice brings to the conversation its limitations as well as its own unique insights and contributions. Before expounding on the theories of Sánchez Vázquez and Echeverría, Gandler provides quite a bit of background information that situates the two philosophers. The social, political, and economic landscape of which they were a part

helps to elucidate the trajectory of their thinking.

Both Sánchez Vázquez and Echeverría struggled against at least two problems that they saw in other forms of Marxism. There is the problem of orthodox Marxism and western Marxism, and then there is the struggle between idealism and materialism. With regards to orthodox Marxism the problem is its dogmatism that in the end leads to a form of political paralysis. While western Marxism is not as dogmatic as orthodox Marxism, it tends to get bogged down in bourgeois philosophical problems and as a result loses its focus on transformative praxis.

It is the problem of praxis or transformative political activity that is at the center of the work of both Sánchez Vázquez and Echeverría. Although their approaches are different they are still complimentary. Sánchez Vázquez's theory of praxis is guided by his deep reading of Marx's *Eleven Thesis on Feuerbach*, particularly the first "Thesis." His theory of praxis is grounded in praxis as the intentional transformation of an object such as nature or society. According to Gandler, Echeverría believed that Sánchez Vázquez's view of praxis was still too abstract. This led Echeverría to develop a theory of praxis which was grounded not just in the transformation of the world but in the constitution of the world. Hence, Echeverría's reading of Marx would extend to the *Grundrisse* and *Capital* as foundational texts for a philosophy of praxis. This focus on the later works by Marx allowed Echeverría to explore more deeply the Marxian concept of use-value as constitutive of human praxis and society.

While Gandler's book is filled with analysis of very interesting theoretical developments by Sánchez Vázquez and Echeverría, I find particularly fascinating the discussions in chapters thirteen and fourteen. Chapter Thirteen examines Echeverría's unique views on capitalism and modernity while Chapter Fourteen examines his concept of historical ethos. In these chapters I find tremendous opportunities for the advancement of Marxism and critical theory in the postmodern era. In these chapters Echeverría's theory offers an interesting challenge to the error of Eurocentrism and the abstract universalism of the current form of social reproduction. Further, the idea of modernity as a global linear development which reaches its highpoint in Europe and the US is dismantled. Echeverría speaks of modernities that coexist but are ignored by the Eurocentric narrative of modernity. Gandler writes:

> Echeverría considers it his role to point out theoretically the *possibility* and even (albeit repressed, concealed, or negated) the *reality* of *other* modernities. From Echeverría's point of view, "actually-existing modernity" is not the only one which really exists, but is, instead, the one which dominates, and moreover from whose perspective the presence or possibility of other modernities is looked upon with disapproval: it simply denies their existence and attempts to crush them in praxis. [p.260]

This quote captures the entire purpose very well insofar as this book is written with the intent to expose the marginalization of non-European versions of Marxism. The discourse of modernity has been constructed in such a way that it has put under erasure various possibilities for creative interpretations of Marx, as well as forms of liberating praxis outside of Europe and the US.

Since Marx himself viewed his theory as historical and subject to historical modification, we must always read Marx anew. However, Gandler and the two philosophers examined in his book remind us that history or the historical is also special (geographical). That is, the historical act occurs in different ways and different places. Every reading of Marx and Marxism occurs with the confines of a particular geo/political location. That location impacts one's reading of a text as well as the particular limitations and insights one may

discover in the text. Gandler's book is a reminder that understanding and getting the most out of Marx requires an international effort.

Bio



Arnold L Farr

Arnold L. Farr received his Ph. D. in philosophy from the University of Kentucky in 1996. He became a member of the philosophy department at St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia PA where he was tenured in 2002. After 12 years at St Joseph's Arnold was hired by the University of Kentucky. His research interests are German idealism, Marxism, critical theory, philosophy of race, postmodernism, psychoanalysis, and liberation philosophy. He has published numorous articles and book chapters on all of these subjects. He is co-author and co-editor of Marginal Groups and Mainstream American Culture. In 2009 he published Critical Theory and Democratic Vision: Herbert Marcuse and Recent Liberation Philosophies. He is currently working on a book on race, a collection of essays on Marcuse, and a single authored manuscript entitled Misrecognition, Mimetic Rivalry, and One-Dimensionality: Toward a Critical Theory of Human Conflict. Arnold is also the founder of the International Herbert Marcuse Society which meets every two years.

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Allison Lakomski, "Review of *Portfolio Society: On the Capitalist Mode of Prediction* by Ivan Ascher (MIT Press)," *Lateral 6.1* (2017).

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Book Reviews
Issue 6.1 (Spring 2017)

Review of *Portfolio Society: On the Capitalist Mode of Prediction* by Ivan Ascher (MIT Press)

Allison Lakomski

ABSTRACT As Ivan Ascher shows in his book "Portfolio Society," since the mid-twentieth century capitalism's developed world has found itself increasingly dependent on a system of money in itself as determinant of value—a system of credit and debt, of perceived risks and predictions.

Portfolio Society: On the Capitalist Mode of Prediction. By Ivan Ascher. New York: MIT Press, 2016, 192 pp. (hardcover) ISBN 9781935408741. US List: $25.95.

The premise of Karl Marx's theory of capital is based in the commodity, in the fact that there is a thing that has a use-value. According to Marx's account, it is only in that there is a tangible good produced by human labor that the owners of the means of production—capitalists—have been able to create a system whereby they can extract surplus-value from labor through the sale of finished commodities at a higher cost than the labor that produced them. Foundational in this concept of economic exchange is the reduction of all commodities to the terms of a general equivalent, a reference point for the relative value of all things. Importantly, money as the general equivalent in the traditional Marxian postulate is contingent upon the fact that laborer-consumers see its value realized in things; implicitly, money would have no value *sans* commodities. And yet, as Ivan Ascher shows in his book *Portfolio Society*, since the mid-twentieth century capitalism's developed world has found itself increasingly dependent on a system of money *in itself* as determinant of value—a system of credit and debt, of perceived risks and predictions.

According to Ascher, the shift from monetary to credit-based transactions has resulted in an evolution in the relationship between people within the marketplace, meaning we can no longer read the exploitative dialectic of capitalism as situated primarily in the realm of production. Freed from the budgetary constraints of wages, workers in advanced capitalism's network of credit and debt are dependent not on their paid labor but, instead, on their credit worthiness—the risk they present to investors.

Unlike others who have employed Marxist political economy to interpret the evolution of capitalism that has resulted in financialization—in which all value is reduced to a system of financial measurement that is based not in commodities or physical monies but in the prediction of the continued production of value—here, Ascher's use of Marx takes a turn when he poses that the neoliberal financialized economy cannot be seen simply as the latest phase in the evolution of capitalist production. Instead, he reads the prediction of the continued production of value as a historical break in which the future of capitalism has become directed by predictive financial markets that have embedded in them a new

form of socio-economic hierarchy of risk, debt, and dependency.

Ascher's discussion of the mass and generalized evaluation of financial borrowing with the rise of credit cards and home mortgages since the Post-War era illustrates a historical transition from Marx's wage relation to a post-industrial credit relation. Borrowers are no longer seen as credit worthy on their own merits but, instead, according to a schema created to predict their likelihood of default based on demographic data. In this turn, which I see as Ascher's greatest contribution, alienation from work and consumption, while still experienced, becomes secondary to a more abstract form of financial alienation. People as debtors are no longer measured according to the relative worth of their labor as measured against the total productive output of society's marketplace but, instead, according to their financial standing and the perceived "risk" of lending to people "like them." Whereas laborers once were asked to see their work as their individual contribution to society, garnering them individual paychecks accordingly, borrowers are now to see their credit worthiness as a reflection of their financial value to the economy, as their contribution to the growth and stability of a socio-economic system that benefits individuals according to their "good" performance. As a "good risk," Ascher's proletarian-debtor is granted access to a greater credit line, which affords them a higher standard of living both at present, through things like credit cards, loans, and mortgages, and in the future, through investments in 401ks and pension funds. However, like the wage laborer before him, the proletarian-debtor fails to see that they are but a number in a totalizing system that derives value in their exploitation and the obliteration of their humanity, providing them neither satisfaction nor the fulfillment of their needs but an ever-increasing number of needs that can presumably be filled through lifelong dependency upon their creditors.

Providing insight into the transition from a productive-based monetary system to a predictive crediting system that is similar to earlier work by David Harvey, what Ascher proposes to be "a defining feature of a new and distinctly uncanny mode of *prediction* and *protection*… a historically unique *portfolio society* in which capital's relation to its own future (and hence everyone's relation to the future) is itself mediation by financial markets" (24) does not actually appear to be a *turn* from earlier theories of the rise of financialized capital as an evolutionary extension of capitalism. If capitalism's sole objective is, and has always been, the production of surplus value, then it seems logical that that *value* was always the central tenant, not production or physical commodities. Arguably, contrary to Ascher's claim that this is a distinct unexpected transformation, the theoretically complex narrative offered in *Portfolio Society* proves that the things upon which the analysis of traditional capitalism and capitalist relations have been based are merely transitional elements in the development of *pure capitalism*. In an enclosed market that uses physical individuals only as agents to crunch numbers, hedge risks, and convince the masses that they can prepare for the future by investing in the present, value can be realized in and of itself and this is key to the continuation of an economic system that has essentially saturated its market and overstayed its welcome.

Historically situated, Marx could not have predicted a transformation of this magnitude, but today we must consider the historical continuity of political economy—the deeply intertwined narratives of market, innovation, and speculation about the future and the static nature of western culture's socio-economic hierarchy. Taken accordingly, *Portfolio Society* provides timely insight into specific instances wherein the public and private sectors colluded in the name of economic growth at the expense of public welfare and the stability of the working class.

Bio

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Allison Lakomski is a PhD Candidate in the Cultural Studies program. She has taught courses in Women's Studies and Cultural Studies. Her field statements were the Political Economy of Consumption and Theories of Affect. She is currently working on here dissertation which traces the historical development of American consumer culture in relation to the development of the supermarket to consider the economic growth and popularity of Whole Foods Market at the present juncture.

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